THE COLLECTED WORKS OF OSCAR WILDE

IN EIGHT PARTS

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POEMS

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

RICHARD LE GALLIENNE

WALTER J. BLACK CO.
7 West 42 Street
NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.
1925

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THE COLLECTED WORKS OF OSCAR WILDE

IN EIGHT PARTS

PART I

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Oscar Wilde was born on October 16, 1854, at 1 Merrion Square, Dublin. His baptismal name was Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde. His father was William Robert Wills Wilde, his mother Jane Francesca Elgee. Both parents were persons of strong individuality, considerable intellectual attainments, and no little distinction. The father had an international reputation as a surgeon, particularly for his treatment of diseases of the eye and ear. In 1853 he was made Surgeon-Oculist-in-Ordinary to the Queen of England, and received the honour of knighthood. In addition to his professional interests, he was a learned antiquary and folklorist, and wrote much on Irish archæology, history and legend. On his frequent antiquarian excursions about the country, the boy Oscar was often his companion.

The mother, while still a young woman, had won fame as a champion of Irish liberty by her impassioned verses signed "Speranza," and, in one notable instance, had shown personal daring

on behalf of the cause. The editor of *The Nation* being on trial for publication of a seditious article, which she had written but not signed, she rose in the court-house and declared: "I am the culprit, if culprit there be;" with the result that her courage won an acquittal both for her editor and herself. Oscar was the second son of his parents, William being their first-born. A third child was the sister who died in girlhood, to whom Oscar wrote the poignantly tender "Requiescat."

The Wildes lived in generous fashion and Oscar early had the advantage of the brilliant and varied society, cosmopolitan and learned, bohemian and "artistic," which his parents, both great talkers and lavishly social, attracted about them. At the age of eleven, Oscar was sent to Portora Royal School, Enniskillen, a training-school for Trinity College, Dublin, where he matriculated, at the age of seventeen, in October 1871. He stayed at Trinity College but a year; long enough, however, to win the Berkeley Gold Medal, for a proficiency afterwards to prove characteristic, the subject of examination being "The Fragments of the Greek Comic Poets, as edited by Meincke."

In 1872 Wilde was entered at Magdalen College, Oxford, winning a demyship of the annual

value of £95. "One who was acquainted with Mr. Wilde at Oxford" has given this sketch of his rooms and his way of life there:

"He soon began to show his taste for art and china, and, before he had been at Oxford very long, his rooms were quite the show ones of the college, and of the university, too. He was fortunate enough to obtain the best-situated rooms in the college, on what is called the kitchen staircase, having a lovely view over the river Cherwell and the beautiful Magdalen walks and Magdalen bridge. His rooms were three in number, and the walls were entirely panelled. The two sitting-rooms were connected by an arch, where folding-doors had at one time stood. His blue china was supposed by connoisseurs to be very valuable and fine, and there was plenty of it. The panelled walls were thickly hung with old engravings—chiefly engravings of the fair sex artistically clad as nature clad them. He was hospitable, and on Sunday nights, after 'Common Room,' his rooms were generally the scene of conviviality, where undergraduates of all descriptions and tastes were to be met, drinking punch, or a 'B. and S.,' with their cigars. It was at one of these entertainments that he made his well-known remark, 'O

would that I could live up to my blue china!' His chief amusement was riding, though he never used to hunt. He was generally to be met on the cricket-field, but never played himself; and he was a regular attendant at his college barge to see the May eight-oar races, but he never used to trust his massive form to a boat himself."

During Wilde's first term at Oxford, Ruskin delivered there his famous lectures on "The Æsthetic and Mathematical Schools of Art in Florence," which, inevitably, had their influence on the young "æsthete," as on other Oxford men of his day. Another formative influence was his journey to Italy and Greece, during 1887, under the wing of that learned Grecian Professor Mahaffy, who was much impressed by his young pupil and made a complimentary reference to him in the preface to his "Social Life in Greece." This tour is referred to throughout his poem *Ravenna*—

"A year ago I breathed the Italian air"—

with which, in 1878, he won the Newdigate Prize for English Verse. *Ravenna* certainly ranks among the very few good poems that have won that historic honour. The tour in Greece was to make the most lasting mark on his mind, and,

when he left Oxford for London in 1878, his Greek scholarship was regarded as one of his most solid achievements. With all the indolence of his nature, he was a sound painstaking scholar, as the laboriously annotated texts of Greek writers used by him at Oxford bear witness.

As we have seen, his "blue china" pose had already given him a certain *réclame* at Oxford, largely derisive in its nature. There he had had his first experience of running the gauntlet of public contempt for his eccentricities of opinion and attitude, a contempt to which he had presented the same good-natured imperturbable front of superb nonchalance, with which he was about to meet the ridicule of the larger world of London society, and was later to brave the uproarious merriment of America—the courage of a calculated impudence with which he was able to disarm and win both.

On moving to London, Wilde determined to reproduce his Oxford rôle of "apostle of the beautiful" on the larger stage; with his practical good sense and instinct for "direct action" to give his belief in beauty an effective advertisement. Ruskin, William Morris, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti had already begun their crusade against

Victorian Philistinism, horse-hair sofas, wax fruit under glass, antimacassars, and all the horrible "decorations" of the period. William Morris, in particular, had begun the reform by the manufacture of beautiful pottery for household needs, not to speak of those famous chairs which have gone all over the world, and which are, it is to be feared, far better known than Morris's poetry. But the ideas of these quiet philosophers, painters, and craftsmen might very well have influenced only a small circle had it not been for that flamboyant young Irishman from Oxford—Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde—who suddenly had the courage—and it must have needed no little—to—

> **Walk down Piccadilly**
> **With a sunflower or a lily**
> **In his mediaeval hand.**

In thus making himself a motley to the view, Wilde, however, was far from defenceless against the general mockery. He was armoured with a humour and a wit none of his critics could match, and he was soon as well known for his gift of fantastic conversation, and the charm of his golden voice, as for his knee-breeches and his sun-

flower. Few could hear him speak without surrendering to that charm, or without realizing the keen intellect behind his apparent flippancy, realizing too the humour behind his seriousness, and being aware that, sincere as were his aims, he was himself immensely enjoying the fun of his own masquerade. In short, he gave the immediate effect of humanity, of being very much of a human being, beneath all his various poses; an advantage which he enjoyed over his imitators and the whole solemn tribe of dilettante "apostles" of the "cults" which have succeeded him.

The English institution called *Punch* played Wilde's game for him, by the spiteful and quite stupid caricature of the æsthete "Postlethwaite." Then Gilbert and Sullivan came more genially to his assistance with "Patience," as a result of which—some say as an involuntary advertisement of it—Wilde undertook his famous lecture tour in America, sailing from England on December 24, 1881.

Earlier in the same year, he had published his first and only volume of poems—"Poems by Oscar Wilde"—a volume, the very binding of which,—vellum, stamped with designs of hawthorn-blossom in gold,—emphasized the poet's mission as the

"apostle of beauty," and, doubtless, thereby further incensed his critics. At all events, while it received some justice here and there, and had something of a popular success, it was for the most part received with that unintelligent contumely with which London reviewers, usually young Oxford graduates of good but impoverished connections, are accustomed to welcome English writers of genius. It was decried, as it has since been too often regarded, as a mere collection of echoes; and that it is imitative of many masters neither admits of, nor needs, denial. But it is more important to acknowledge that the "imitations" give evidence of an original poetic gift such as has seldom been found in the imitative juvenilia of other poets. Wilde is not the only writer who has combined imitation with originality; and his early poems are "imitations" that could only have been made by a strong, original mind.

In that matter of imitation, too, much depends on the models the young writer chooses to imitate; and it was certainly significant, and of good omen, that Wilde, while echoing Keats and Swinburne, as was to be expected, was evidently much more under the influence of such austerer poets as Milton, Wordsworth, and Matthew

Arnold. His devotion to the great sane and central masters of English poetry was evident on every page. Indeed, throughout all his writing to the end, such bracing influences as theirs are always present. The stern marble masters of Greece and Rome, and those in modern literature who have most been modelled upon their style and vitalized by their spirit—these, with the Bible and Shakespeare, were always the sustaining influences behind all Wilde's intellectual vagaries and excursions into the exotic and the bizarre. It was because he had such a firm hold on Homer and Plato and Shakespeare, on the eternal humanities, and on the eternal verities too, that Wilde was able to give to his rôles of dandy and society fool so arresting a significance.

In the opening sonnet of the volume—"Hélas" —a sonnet which, as we look back, has an ominous and pathetic significance, there are two lines which show Wilde's intimate knowledge of the Bible, a reference for which few Bible readers, not to speak of his hostile critics, could, offhand, give chapter and verse:

> ". . . Lo! with a little rod
> I did but touch the honey of romance—"

And, imitation or not, this first volume of poems was full of strength and beauty, and still vibrates with youthful vitality. All poets, great or small, more or less echo each other—that is what we call the poetic tradition!—and we could hardly afford to lose such an echo, if echo it be, as that noble sonnet (Wilde wrote some of the best sonnets of his time) to "Liberty," with its poignant close, foreshadowing the seriousness of his essay on "The Soul of Man under Socialism"—

> "Those Christs that die upon the barricades,
> God knows it I am with them, in some things."

"Spirit of beauty," run the lines which he had painted in gold along the frieze of his Chelsea drawing-room:

> "tarry still a-while,
> They are not dead, thine ancient votaries,
> Some few there are to whom thy radiant smile
> Is better than a thousand victories."

That spirit is indeed present in this young volume, but by no means with the wearisome "lushness" of presentation with which it has been found before and since in volumes by other poets of "the fleshly school," and it was associated with many other austere and even stern interests. The

man who could write "Ave Imperatrix" of the British Empire deserves to have been better understood of his countrymen; and the stretched octave of achievement between the bugles of that poem and the poppies of "Panthea"—wherein the pantheistic conception of the immortality of the body is expressed with such rare beauty—gave earnest of a gift that was to be of the widest range, and even more at the service of the spirit and the intellect than of the senses.

But any understanding of the real nature of Wilde's gifts, and of the significance of his personality to his time, were far off in 1881, and perhaps the world was scarcely to blame that it missed the poet, the social revolutionist, in the antics of the "æsthetic" buffoon.

America certainly understood Wilde far better in those days than England did—perhaps from the fact that, being a nation of "jolliers," it soon realized the fact that, behind his posturings, he was a "jollier" too. He landed in New York on January 2, 1882, and, as he stepped off the boat, long-haired and fur-coated, he made two of his most famous witticisms. To the reporters he confessed himself "disappointed with the Atlantic," and to the custom-house officers he declared that

he had "nothing to declare—but my genius." Then he went forth to lecture America on "The English Renaissance of Art," giving the lecture so entitled for the first time in Chickering Hall, New York, on January 9, 1882. He repeated it in many other American towns, and lectured also on "House Decoration," "Art and the Handicraftsman," and "What Makes an Artist." His tour was an emphatic success, both for his ideas, himself, and his purse. As was only natural, he met with much ridicule and misunderstanding, though the ridicule was mostly good-natured, and both usually preceded rather than followed his lectures. On the whole, Americans "took to him." They found that he could laugh with them; and, more, that, whereas they had expected sentimental verbiage, he talked surprisingly good sense. They went to his lectures to mock, remained to applaud, and went away to discuss or adopt his ideas; and, if our houses and general surroundings, our very clothing, are more beautiful to-day, we owe it to Wilde's fearless impudence, if you like, to his willingness to play the fool in a good cause.

Moreover, he surprised America by a frank admiration of so much that no one expected to see him admire—American machinery, for example.

"There is no country in the world," he said, "where machinery is so lovely as in America. I have always wished to believe that the line of strength and the line of beauty are one. That wish was realized when I contemplated American machinery. It was not until I had seen the waterworks at Chicago that I realized the wonders of machinery; the rise and fall of the steel rods, the symmetrical motion of great wheels, is the most beautifully rhythmic thing I have ever seen."

Again, on his return from the West, when America and he had become mutually well acquainted, he had this to say on men's dress in his second New York lecture, at Wallack's Theatre, May 11, 1882: "And how shall men dress? Men say they don't particularly care how they dress, and that it is a little matter. I am bound to reply that I do not believe them, and do not think that you do. In all my journeys through the country, the only well-dressed men that I saw—and in saying this I earnestly deprecate the polished indignation of your Fifth Avenue dandies—were the Western miners. Their wide-brimmed hats, which shaded their faces from the sun and protected them from the rain, and the cloak, which is by far the most beautiful piece of drapery ever

invented, may well be dwelt on with admiration. Their high boots, too, were sensible and practical. They only wore what was comfortable, and, therefore, beautiful. As I looked at them I could not help thinking with regret of the time when these picturesque miners should have made their fortunes and would go East to assume again all the abominations of fashionable attire. Indeed, so concerned was I that I made some of them promise that when they again appeared in the more crowded scenes of Eastern civilization, they would still continue to wear their lovely costume. But I don't believe they will."

Again, this from a talk with an interviewer: "People's appreciation of beauty depends so much on what they are accustomed to see around them. It might be thought otherwise from those who live in beautiful places not speaking about beauty, but they have no need to talk about it. That is our object. We want to see the homes of the people beautiful, and where this is the case people will no longer talk of the beautiful at all. We are forced to do so now because there are so many ugly things in the world. In the ideal state of art there will be no art lecturer."

"That man is no fool—though he does his

best to behave like one," said an English business-man, listening to Wilde on his return to England, as he lectured on his experiences in America; and that seems to have been the general impression Wilde left behind him wherever he lectured. That certainly sums up the impression he made upon America.

Indeed, generally speaking, the greatest surprise that Wilde was able to give the world from the beginning to the end of his life, the supreme paradox of his career, was that he whom it began by regarding as an insufferable zany, supreme for folly even among fools, was actually one of the most searching intellects of his time, one of its saddest, most serious, most human and most humorous spirits.

That he actually "talked sense" was the surprise of his first audience. It was a surprise that was to be repeated as time went on. Well might he cry out against ". . . those slanderous fools that mock my life, knowing me not."

Though he seldom indulged in it, Wilde had on occasion a fine gift of scorn, as in this passage from a letter to Joaquin Miller, who had written sympathetically to him *à propos* certain "Philistine" newspaper criticisms: "Who are these

scribes, who, passing with purposeless alacrity from the police news to the Parthenon, and from crime to criticism, sway with such serene incapacity the office which they so lately swept?"

After his return to England, Wilde spent a year in Paris, made welcome by the artistic society of the time, which included Victor Hugo, Alphonse Daudet, Edmund de Goncourt, Paul Bourget, Jean Richepin, Sarah Bernhardt; and it is on record that he once met Paul Verlaine at the Café François Premier. During his stay in Paris, he wrote his poem "The Sphinx," and his play "The Duchess of Padua," a projected production of which by Miss Mary Anderson was abandoned. In August 1883, he made a brief visit to America, to superintend the production of his play, "Vera, the Nihilist,"—which he is said to have written as early as 1876. The play was not a success, and Wilde returned to England to make a lecture tour of the English provinces, giving no less than a hundred and fifty addresses. It was one of these lectures, in Dublin, that won Wilde his wife—Miss Constance Lloyd, to whom he was married on May 29, 1884.

By this time, he had abandoned his early eccentricities of dress, wore his hair short (having

had a French barber to model it, so he whimsically told a New York reporter, after the bust of Nero in the Louvre) and generally presented the appearance of the modish man about town. Soon, for the sunflower and the lily, he was to display the famous green carnation in his button-hole.

Meanwhile he seriously set himself down to earning his living as the editor of the *Woman's World,* and to playing with his children and telling them stories with his beautiful and elaborately modulated voice. His first volume of fairy tales, "The Happy Prince, and Other Tales" (1888), is the memorial of this tranquil and idyllic period of his life. These stories well illustrate the chameleon quality of his nature and his literary gift; for they are as child-hearted as the stories of Hans Andersen, and written in the simplest words and most unaffected style.

They are filled, too, with that sense of pity for human suffering, particularly the suffering of the poor, which he never lost even in his most artificial period—a sense which is one of many characteristics that sharply distinguish him from his imitators. Such stories as "The Happy Prince" and "The Selfish Giant"—to which one may add "The Young King," from his later and more

elaborately wrought volume, "The House of Pomegranates"—will remain while English lasts as touching contributions to the literature of pity. The moral of "The Young King," in particular, shows with what a sympathetic eye this intellectual dandy looked upon those who do the hard and dreary work of the world, and support that superstructure of society which he loved at once to satirize and to amuse.

Three nights before his coronation the young king has three dreams, in which he sees the weaver wearily weaving his coronation robe; the diver, with blood gushing from his ears and nostrils, as he brings up a great pearl from the sea which is to be set in his sceptre; and a multitude of men toiling in the bed of a dried-up river to find rubies for his crown. The dreams impress him so much that at his coronation he refuses to wear or carry these insignia of his office.

"Shall Joy wear what Grief has fashioned?" he asks the old bishop who is waiting to crown him—and in that simple phrase, how, as with a sword, he smites through to the heart of the selfish materialism of modern society!

He was to develop that same theme later in an essay which perhaps remains the greatest surprise

and enigma of his career, "The Soul of Man under Socialism." Meanwhile, he almost immediately followed up his fairy tales with a romance that was certainly as far removed from them in spirit as possible—the exotic, cynical, and gruesomely tragic romance of "The Picture of Dorian Gray" (1890). The power of this story is undeniable, and its moral is scarcely less shuddering than that of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." There is much beauty in the book, too; but its atmosphere breathes evil, and the sweetness throughout is sinister. However, that was necessary to the story, and an element of refreshment is to be found in its brilliant conversations. In these Wilde first came definitely before the reading public as the wit who had long been known in London society.

"The man," says one of his characters, "who can dominate a London dinner-table can dominate the world."

Wilde was already dominating London dinner-tables with his extraordinary conversation. Soon, through the medium of his plays, he was to dominate the world by his gift of saying brilliant, nonsensical things which first made one laugh, often in spite of oneself, and then set one thinking—presently to realize that they were far from being

as nonsensical as they seemed, but were actually profound criticisms on life in disguise. Like the old-time fool with his cap and bells, Wilde had taken up the rôle of king's jester to the public, and, while amusing it, he got home with deep and drastic truths it would have heeded in no other form.

A hint of the forthcoming plays was presently given in the dialogue on "The Decay of Lying," printed in 1890 in the *Nineteenth Century,* a whimsical paradoxical arraignment of "realism" and that realistic school of novelists, with Zola as its master, which was then the fashion. By "lying" Wilde meant the power of imagination, and his dialogue was a plea for romance, invention, and fantasy in fiction. He begins thus:

"One of the chief causes that can be assigned for the curiously commonplace character of most of the literature of our age is undoubtedly the decay of lying as an art, a science, and a social pleasure. The ancient historians gave us delightful fiction in the form of fact; the modern novelist presents us with dull facts under the guise of fiction. The blue book is rapidly becoming his ideal book for method and manner."

Passages such as this give us a foretaste of the

dialogue that was soon to convulse with laughter not merely the stalls of London theatres, but the "gods" of the gallery and the pit, for Wilde's wit had such a basis of common sense that it appealed to all classes.

"Thinking is the most unhealthy thing in the world, and people die of it just as they die of any other disease. Fortunately in England, at any rate, thought is not catching. Our splendid physique as a people is entirely due to our national stupidity. I only hope we shall be able to keep this great, historic bulwark of our happiness for many years to come; but I am afraid that we are beginning to be overeducated. At least, everybody who is incapable of learning has taken to teaching."

Side by side with these gayer excursions into paradox there appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* that essay on "The Soul of Man under Socialism" (1891), already mentioned, which perhaps shows the essential seriousness of Wilde's mind more than any other of his writings. Though here and there he employs his favourite method of flippant badinage, for the most part the essay is very gravely written. Wilde fearlessly strikes to the root of the matter, showing at once his instinctive sympathy with the victims of our present social

system, and his understanding of its practical problems. This essay shows how sincere had been his sigh at the end of his boyish sonnet on democracy:

> "These Christs that die upon the barricades,
> God knows it I am with them in some things!"

Indeed, Wilde's heart was always in the right place, for all his affectation of cynicism. Sorrow and poverty never appealed to him in vain—as, years after, on his discharge from prison, his letters to the London *Daily Chronicle* on "The Case of Warder Martin," dealing with the cruel treatmen of some children in jail, which had come under his notice, were further to testify.

Here are a few sentences from "The Soul of Man under Socialism" which will illustrate the temper of the whole essay:

"Some try to solve the problem of poverty by keeping the poor alive; or, in the case of a very advanced school, by amusing the poor. But this is not a solution; it is an aggravation of the difficulty. The proper aim is to try and construct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible. And the altruistic virtues have really prevented the carrying out of this aim.

"Upon the other hand, socialism itself will be of value simply because it will lead to individualism. Socialism, communism, or whatever one chooses to call it, by converting private property into public wealth and substituting coöperation for competition, will restore society to its proper condition of a thoroughly healthy organism, and insure the material well-being of each member of the community. It will, in fact, give life its proper basis and its proper environment.

"But for the full development of life to its highest mode of perfection something more is needed. What is needed is individualism. If the socialism is authoritarian; if there are governments armed with economic power as they are now with political power; if, in a word, we are to have industrial tyrannies, then the last state of man will be worse than the first.

"Nothing should be able to harm a man except himself. Nothing should be able to rob a man at all. What a man really has is what is in him. What is outside of him should be a matter of no importance.

"It will be a marvellous thing—the true personality of man—when we see it. Its value will not be measured by material things. It will have

nothing. And yet it will have everything, and whatever one takes from it, it will still have, so rich will it be. It will not always be meddling with others, or asking them to be like itself. It will love them because they will be different. And yet, while it will not meddle with others, it will help all, as a beautiful thing helps us by being what it is. The personality of man will be very wonderful. It will be as wonderful as the personality of a child."

On February 22, 1892, was produced "Lady Windermere's Fan," and Wilde entered upon that career of triumph which was as splendid as it was brief. For three years London was at his feet. Since Sheridan no dramatist had so completely "taken the town." He laughed, and the world laughed with him. In 1892, he also wrote *Salome,* in the French language, and Madame Bernhardt was to have produced the play in London. The censor, however, intervened. It was afterwards produced with success in Germany and Italy, and in Paris by M. Lugné Poë. Strauss made it the subject of his well-known opera; and it was also published in book-form, with illustrations which introduced to the world the remarkable genius of Aubrey Beardsley.

"Lady Windermere's Fan" was followed on April 19, 1893, by "A Woman of No Importance"; and "An Ideal Husband" and "The Importance of Being Earnest" were produced within six weeks of each other—January 3, 1895, and February 14, 1895, respectively. Three of his plays were running simultaneously at London theatres when the stroke of destiny fell upon that gay, victorious figure, "the last of the dandies," which was to convert him into the most tragic figure of our time. As the outcome of the ill-judged libel action which he brought against the Marquis of Queensberry, he was convicted of endeavouring to live according to a code of ethics to which ancient Greek society gave a certain countenance, but which has long been found unacceptable by Western civilization; and on May 25, 1895, he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment with hard labour, a part of which sentence he served in Wandsworth Prison, and a part in Reading Gaol.

Out of the ordeal of his imprisonment Wilde came with a broken spirit, and surely with a contrite heart, as "De Profundis" and the splendid swan-song of "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" bear noble witness. As one looks back, and then again realizes the reaction that has set in, since his

death, toward a truer and lasting understanding of his genius, one can only vainly wish that the generation which saw both his triumph and his disgrace had been more generous in its attitude when, having gone through his ordeal and paid the bitter price, he was once more in the world, in the full maturity of his powers, and with a soul chastened and purged as by fire.

There is no estimating what the stimulus of a more kindly front toward him on the part of a public which he had delighted, and which he had also instructed far more than it realized, might have done for his genius. At all events he could hardly have given us any more comedies, and perhaps it was best, after all, that he should leave us his broken heart in "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," and go rest in peace.

> **Yet all is well; he has but passed**
> **To life's appointed bourn,**
> **And alien tears will fill for him**
> **Pity's long-broken urn.**

Oscar Wilde died in Paris on November 30, 1900, and lies buried in Père-la-Chaise.

Already the sad side of his story is taking its proper subordinate place in his career, the shadows of which are already passing away before the

lasting radiance of the truth and beauty that was in him. Society begins to understand the difficult temperament of a man of genius better than it did even so short a time ago as during Wilde's generation. As a well-known American "captain of industry" said to me *à propos* a recent revival of "An Ideal Husband"—and I quote him, because, nine times out of ten, I prefer the opinion of a cultivated business-man on literature to that of a professional critic:

"The artist nature does not possess the strong moral brakes on temperament, the delicate system of balances, which control the average human machine—the all-around, well-balanced man, as we say. Otherwise he would not be an artist."

It has been not the least of Wilde's misfortunes that he has been posthumously appropriated for their own by an unpleasant rag-tag and bobtail of literary and artistic failures and *poseurs,* would-be "decadents" and "degenerates," not to speak of those "biographers" who, as Wilde once said, "always go in with the undertaker." These undesirable parasites, "maggots in the decay of the divine," knew nothing of Wilde's strength. It has been their unsavory trade to traffic in his weakness. They knew nothing of his profound

intellectual and spiritual health. Their only care was to note and exaggerate the marks of decay in a noble mind.

It goes without saying that his cleansing humour and his drastic, purifying wit—wit like a surgeon's knife—are as little their affair as his innocent fairy tales and his profound meditations on "The Soul of Man under Socialism." Like flies on carrion, these vermin on a great mind love best to feast on the morbidity of his "Salome"—missing what is really fine and significant even in that uncharacteristic and imitative play—or on the merely Corinthian elements of "Dorian Gray." The Wilde they are alone interested in —and him, too, they misunderstand—was the whimsical worldling who loved to scandalize the respectable middle-class English mind with talk of "strange sins" and "purple passions." Only moping intellectual perverts could take such talk seriously. With Wilde it was merely "for fun," and as much a joke on his "disciples" as on the respectable middle-class mind.

Wilde had too much brain to take evil seriously. His writings show that he was more interested in goodness, from an intellectual point of view, as being a greater mystery than evil. And there is

nothing more surprising in his complex nature than the way in which sophistication and simplicity are found together, and even harmonized. He was, of course, thinking of this seeming incongruity in his own make-up when he wrote "simplicity is the last refuge of the complex," thus saying, as his method always was, a serious thing in an apparently trivial way.

This persistent humorous disguise of his real intellectual and spiritual self is not unnaturally misleading, and has caused him to be misunderstood; though, in the end, as he doubtless intended, it has made the serious side of him the more effective. For the modern world looks askance on prosing moralists, suspecting them of being either professionals or hypocrites, and has little faith in any truth that cannot face the test of laughter.

If one were to take Wilde as his "biographers" and those "sedulous apes," his very poor imitators, would have us do, we should think of him as caring for nothing but the "poison-honey" of certain forms of French literature—Baudelaire's "Fleurs du Mal," Huysmans' "À Rebours," Flaubert's "Salammbô" and "La Tentation de Saint Antoine." Of course, these great writers had

their influence upon him, as they have influenced all writers who have come after them; but it will, I think, be a surprise to many readers of Oscar Wilde that, much as he admired Baudelaire's "Fleurs du Mal," he was also an admirer of "John Halifax, Gentleman." There is a stretching of the octave of which few men in our time have been capable, and I think that no more significant evidence could be brought, not merely of his intellectual many-sidedness, but of the remarkable inclusiveness of his humanity.

Who, indeed, could have supposed that the novelist of "Dorian Gray," the dramatist of "Salome," the poet of "The Sphinx," could have felt as he did about Mrs. Craik and her famous masterpiece? On the occasion of her death, Wilde wrote:

"Mrs. Craik will live long in the affectionate memory of all who knew her, and one of her novels, at any rate, will always have a high and honourable place in English fiction. Indeed, for simple narrative power, some of the chapters of 'John Halifax, Gentleman,' are almost unequalled in prose literature."

Many as were the parts played by Wilde in his picturesque, meteoric career, it was as a wit that

he exercised the greatest influence upon his time; but his wit would not have had its driving force had he not been a poet, a philosopher, a deep and sad thinker upon life, as well as a laughing one. To be at once so sensitive a poet, so warmly human, so alive alike to the absurdity and the gravity of human life, and so accomplished a man of the world, is a rare combination. All this various background of his nature gives Wilde's wit a richness and a lasting application which distinguish it from any other wit of our time.

One of its significant qualities is its kindness. Impudent as it often is, and sets out to be, it is seldom unkind, and never bitter. There it is markedly different from the wit of Whistler, who absurdly pretended, with his characteristic arrogance, that Wilde had stolen his wit from him—as if a man could steal a general habit of mind. We all know the anecdote of Wilde congratulating Whistler on a *mot,* and generously adding how much he would like to have said it.

"Never mind, Oscar, you will say it," was the ugly retort, like the swift sting of a hornet.

Whistler's wit was always of the same kind, always a mean irritability vented against his rivals. Oscar Wilde's, on the contrary, played

over all social absurdities like laughing sunshine. There was always something kind and even lovable about it; it was playful, like a clever child—and Wilde, indeed, was all his life no little of a child. It is that quality in him which made it possible to write such exquisite nonsense as "The Importance of Being Earnest"—perhaps the one thing he did that was incapable of imitation by his contemporaries.

By the side of Wilde's wit such wit as Bernard Shaw's has a lean and hungry look—ill-nourished on the humanities, the wit of a schoolmaster, a doctrinaire, or a smart, atheistic, half-educated mechanic. Its appeal to the lower middle classes has naturally been enormous; but Wilde's wit appealed to all classes, for it drew its nutriment from a deep and rich culture and a broad, sympathetic knowledge of human beings in general.

Though it is his wit, the marvellous play of phrases tossed from one character to another, that mainly accounts for the success of Wilde's plays —proving, even more than the plays of Sheridan, that dialogue with a minimum of plot can carry a play, in spite of the critics—it must not be forgotten that Wilde has a great gift for character-creation, too. His figures are not mere puppets,

as some have tried to make out, automata for the discharge of epigrams. On the contrary, they have all been closely observed, and they spring to life spontaneously, without any apparent effort of their creator. This is as true of reading the plays, as of seeing them acted.

All the same, when the play is ended, and characters and dialogue alike have served their first purpose of making us laugh an evening through, we find the phrases of the dialogue coming back to us with an independent life. They haunt us with deeper meanings and wider applications than we had suspected. In fact, over and above our amusement, we find ourselves with an intellectual residuum, a piquant stimulus of thought, such as no other English playwright of our time has brought us. The phrases were certainly amusing, but, as they recur to us, we become more and more struck by their remarkably destructive or instructive truth.

Here are a few such phrases picked at random from the plays:

"We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars."

"Experience is the name Tubby gives to his mistakes."

"What a pity that in life we only get our lessons when they are of no use to us!"

"Pleasure is Nature's test, her sign of approval. When we are happy, we are always good; but when we are good, we are not always happy."

"An idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all."

"In this world there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it. The last is much the worst, the last is the real tragedy."

"Discontent is the starting-point in every man's career."

"To recommend thrift to the poor is both grotesque and insulting. It is like advising a man who is starving to eat less."

"Nothing is so dangerous as being too modern. One is apt to grow old-fashioned quite suddenly."

"Philanthropic people lose all sense of humanity."

"The fact of a man being a poisoner is nothing against his prose."

"What is a cynic? A man who knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing."

Perhaps this last phrase is the finest thing Wilde ever said; but often during these last few

years I have thought of another saying of his, flippant on the surface, like so many, but, when analyzed and applied as it was meant to be, how profound and far-reaching! Speaking of the possibility of the arts making a bond of friendship between nations, he says that some day, when the world grows really civilized, men will say:

"We will not go to war with France, because her prose is perfect."

How lightly it is said, but what a world of truth and common sense lies beneath it! Will the time never come when spiritual and intellectual gratitude between nations will prove in itself an indissoluble league, and the great men and great achievements of individual nations give them a certain protective sacredness even in the eyes of their enemies? But alas, Rheims and Louvain are in ruins, and it was found necessary to protect even St. Mark's and Notre-Dame with sand-bags.

Mr. Julian Hawthorne has recorded that Wilde once complained to him: "The one thing about me that nobody seems to understand is, that I am always absolutely sincere." To believe that he was absolutely sincere in saying that may be difficult for those who discredit a man's sin-

cerity unless it wears a face solemn with seriousness, and lined with earnestness of purpose. Intellectual sincerity was certainly his, and the power of his best epigrams lies in the strong brain-work behind them. His most famous *mots* were not so much meant to be witty as to be true. To tell the truth in a world that has so little courage to tell it, to think for oneself in a world that has always let others think for it, is, by sheer contrast, one of the most effective forms of wit. I have elsewhere defined Wilde's favourite form of wit, the paradox, as Truth standing on its head to attract attention. Wilde, as one of the greatest advertisers of all time, realized that the great need of truth is advertisement. No mere placid, or even vehement, statement of a truth will ever gain the circulation that can be given it by a witty phrase. It used often to be said that anyone could make epigrams after the Wilde pattern —and we thank Bernard Shaw for saying that he seemed to be the only man in London who couldn't write a Wilde play. The thing, Wilde's critics said, was merely a cheap and easy trick—merely the turning of a well-known proverb upside down. Occasionally, doubtless, that was the case—though, even so, in Wilde's hands, the effect

of turning the proverb upside down had a decidedly novel effect of truth. A great deal depends on your choice of the proverb for the purpose. As a rule, as we have seen, Wilde's more serious epigrams compressed in one seed-like phrase a whole philosophy of life.

The world is no little of a solemn owl, and unless you hoot your wisdom at it, in an owl-like way, it is likely to be lost upon it, and you are certain to be misunderstood, at least for a while. So at first it was with Wilde, but the temper of the times was changing. Men were unconsciously wearying of the platitudinous shop-keeper's moralities of Victorian respectability; and, with Wilde's plays, the age delightedly found a mouthpiece for its boredom, a voice that expressed its own serious suspicions in regard to its social shams and hypocrisies, not by ponderous denunciation, but with a gaiety of satirical exposure very grateful to the spirit of a new youth, nonchalantly bent on a fresh adventure with life. Wilde did not over-estimate himself, when in "De Profundis" he declared himself a symbolic figure.

He was both symbolic and prophetic, the type of a new period, a creative revolutionist, whose dynamite was laughter. How much that was

smugly accepted when he began his "first period," —as he mock-seriously called it—of his knee-breeches and sunflower, has already been laughed out of existence by a handful of his phrases!

There are those who still refuse to regard him as important, denying him originality in his "æsthetic" mission, because he learned from Ruskin and Morris, and in his writings because they are often in the manners of other men. We are told that he was merely "an artist in attitudes," that his writings are merely clever *pastiche*. This I believe to be unjust. If not, there is very little originality in the world that would stand so narrow a test. An "originality" that has not borrowed anything from its predecessors is unknown. The most original thinker has a predecessor who gave him the vital hint. And, if it be said, that Wilde derived from many sources, is there not an originality of combination, an alchemy which transforms the known into the new?

Surely Wilde's was an astonishing combination: so devoted a love of beauty, and so unerring an eye for comedy; as though Keats and Sheridan had been reincarnated in one man. One might add Beau Brummell, and one gains a rough gener-

alization of the complexity that was Oscar Wilde. Keats, Sheridan and Beau Brummell. Not that he was so eminent as any one of these in their own special characteristic; but it was the combination of all three in one man, plus his own extraordinary individuality, that made him an original figure, made him—Oscar Wilde.

He was fond of saying that he "gave his talent to his writings—but kept his genius for his conversation." Those who have heard him talk will probably agree that this was good self-judgment. The fascination of his talk was acknowledged by the least friendly: its combination of beauty with brilliancy, of fantasy with common sense, its range, and the readiness with which he drew on his richly stored memory, together with the remarkable charm of his voice. There is no question that when he talked, all his various powers worked together in the most perfect harmony. M. Jean Joseph-Renaud, who translated his "Intentions" into French, has put on record an impression of one of his conversations. At first M. Joseph-Renaud was not pleased, was in fact emphatically disappointed, even irritated, but as Wilde, so to say, got into his stride, he soon found reason to change his opinion, ending with complete

surrender to the power and charm of the talker.

"But later on in the drawing-room," he writes, "while coffee was being served, the conversation having turned on the success of a French comedy in England and Germany, he gently suggested that our prodigious theatrical instinct explains many of our acts: French foreign politics, for instance, are theatrical; they aim rather at the finest attitude, the most striking phrases, the most effective gestures, than at any practical successes. He then examined our history at length, from Charles X up to modern times, from a paradoxical point of view. His conversation transformed itself; he displayed extraordinary knowledge and wit. Men, deeds, treaties, wars passed under review, with appreciations, unsuspected, amusing, exact. He made them glitter under the light of his words, even as a jeweller awakes new lights in his gems. He then went on to talk about Lady Blessington and Disraeli. To tell us of the pains of love of Lady Blessington he little by little raised himself to a lofty and intoxicating lyricism; his fine voice hymned, grew tender, rang out, like a viol, in the midst of the emotional silence. This Englishman, who just before had appeared grotesque, reached, reached with simplicity, aye,

surpassed, the expressive power of the most admirable odes of humanity. Many of us were moved to tears. One had never thought that the words of man could attain to such splendour. And this took place in a drawing-room, and the man who was speaking never spoke otherwise than as a man speaks in a drawing-room. We could understand that a great lady had said of him: 'When he is speaking I see round his head a luminous aureole.' "

Walter Pater in reviewing "Dorian Gray" says: "There is always something of an excellent talker about the writings of Mr. Oscar Wilde; and in his hands, as happens so rarely with those who practise it, the form of dialogue is justified by its being really alive."

Yet, if it be admitted that, of the various media of artistic expression at Wilde's command, conversation was that in which he was most successful, most completely and triumphantly himself, it is as futile as it is unjust to deny him great and distinguished success in those other media to which, as he whimsically expressed it, he occasionally "condescended." If his tongue was more magical than his pen, he is but in the same case as other men endowed with more gifts than one.

Men who heard Coleridge talk thought comparatively little of his poems. Yet now, when "the great silent talker makes no sign," I believe that Wilde's writings, which he himself regarded as the mere marginalia of his personality, will be found to have a *raison d'être* of their own, independent of his "legend," independent too of their historic influence upon his time; as lasting contributions to the literature of beauty, of fancy, of pity, as well as to the literature of thought and of wit.

RAVENNA

RAVENNA.

A year ago I breathed the Italian air,—
And yet, methinks this northern Spring is fair,—
These fields made golden with the flower of March,
The throstle singing on the feathered larch,
The cawing rooks, the wood-doves fluttering by,
The little clouds that race across the sky;
And fair the violet's gentle drooping head,
The primrose, pale for love uncomforted,
The rose that burgeons on the climbing briar,
The crocus-bed, (that seems a moon of fire
Round-girdled with a purple marriage-ring);
And all the flowers of our English Spring,
Fond snow-drops, and the bright-starred daffodil.
Up starts the lark beside the murmuring mill,
And breaks the gossamer-threads of early dew;
And down the river, like a flame of blue,
Keen as an arrow flies the water-king,
While the brown linnets in the greenwood sing.

A year ago!—it seems a little time
Since last I saw that lordly southern clime,
Where flower and fruit to purple radiance blow,
And like bright lamps the fabled apples grow.
Full Spring it was—and by rich flowering vines,
Dark olive-groves and noble forest-pines,
I rode at will; the moist glad air was sweet,
The white road rang beneath my horse's feet,
And musing on Ravenna's ancient name,
I watched the day till, marked with wounds of flame,
The turquoise sky to burnished gold was turned.

O how my heart with boyish passion burned,
When far away across the sedge and mere
I saw that Holy City rising clear,
Crowned with her crown of towers!—On and on
I galloped, racing with the setting sun,
And ere the crimson after-glow was passed,
I stood within Ravenna's walls at last!

II.

How strangely still! no sound of life or joy
Startles the air! no laughing shepherd-boy
Pipes on his reed, nor ever through the day
Comes the glad sound of children at their play:

O sad, and sweet, and silent! surely here
A man might dwell apart from troublous fear,
Watching the tide of seasons as they flow
From amorous Spring to Winter's rain and snow,
And have no thought of sorrow;—here, indeed,
Are Lethe's waters, and that fatal weed
Which makes a man forget his fatherland.

Ay! amid lotus-meadows dost thou stand,
Like Proserpine, with poppy-laden head,
Guarding the holy ashes of the dead.
For though thy brood of warrior sons hath ceased,
Thy noble dead are with thee!—they at least
Are faithful to thine honour:—guard them well,
O childless city! for a mighty spell,
To wake men's hearts to dream of things sublime,
Are the lone tombs where rest the Great of Time.

III.

Yon lonely pillar, rising on the plain,
Marks where the bravest knight of France was slain,—
The Prince of chivalry, the Lord of war,
Gaston de Foix: for some untimely star

Led him against thy city, and he fell,
As falls some forest-lion fighting well.
Taken from life while life and love were new,
He lies beneath God's seamless veil of blue;
Tall lance-like reeds wave sadly o'er his head,
And oleanders bloom to deeper red,
Where his bright youth flowed crimson on the ground.

Look farther north unto that broken mound,—
There, prisoned now within a lordly tomb
Raised by a daughter's hand, in lonely gloom,
Huge-limbed Theodoric, the Gothic king,
Sleeps after all his weary conquering.
Time hath not spared his ruin,—wind and rain
Have broken down his stronghold; and again
We see that Death is mighty lord of all,
And king and clown to ashen dust must fall.

Mighty indeed *their* glory! yet to me
Barbaric king, or knight of chivalry,
Or the great queen herself, were poor and vain
Beside the grave where Dante rests from pain.
His gilded shrine lies open to the air;
And cunning sculptor's hands have carven there
The calm white brow, as calm as earliest morn,

The eyes that flashed with passionate love and
scorn,
The lips that sang of Heaven and of Hell,
The almond-face which Giotto drew so well,
The weary face of Dante;—to this day,
Here in his place of resting, far away
From Arno's yellow waters, rushing down
Through the wide bridges of that fairy town,
Where the tall tower of Giotto seems to rise
A marble lily under sapphire skies!
Alas! my Dante! thou hast known the pain
Of meaner lives,—the exile's galling chain,
How steep the stairs within king's houses are,
And all the petty miseries which mar
Man's nobler nature with the sense of wrong.
Yet this dull world is grateful for thy song;
Our nations do thee homage,—even she,
That cruel queen of vine-clad Tuscany,
Who bound with crown of thorns thy living
brow,
Hath decked thine empty tomb with laurels now,
And begs in vain the ashes of her son.

O mightiest exile! all thy grief is done:
Thy soul walks now beside thy Beatrice;
Ravenna guards thine ashes: sleep in peace.

IV.

How lone this palace is; how grey the walls!
No minstrel now wakes echoes in these halls.
The broken chain lies rusting on the door,
And noisome weeds have split the marble floor:
Here lurks the snake, and here the lizards run
By the stone lions blinking in the sun.
Byron dwelt here in love and revelry
For two long years—a second Anthony,
Who of the world another Actium made!—
Yet suffered not his royal soul to fade,
Or lyre to break, or lance to grow less keen,
'Neath any wiles of an Egyptian queen.
For from the East there came a mighty cry,
And Greece stood up to fight for Liberty,
And called him from Ravenna: never knight
Rode forth more nobly to wild scenes of fight!
None fell more bravely on ensanguined field,
Borne like a Spartan back upon his shield!
O Hellas! Hellas! in thine hour of pride,
Thy day of might, remember him who died
To wrest from off thy limbs the trammelling chain:
O Salamis! O lone Platæan plain!
O tossing waves of wild Eubœan sea!

O wind-swept heights of lone Thermopylæ!
He loved you well—ay, not alone in word,
Who freely gave to thee his lyre and sword,
Like Æschylus at well-fought Marathon:

And England, too, shall glory in her son,
Her warrior-poet, first in song and fight.
No longer now shall Slander's venomed spite
Crawl like a snake across his perfect name,
Or mar the lordly scutcheon of his fame.

For as the olive-garland of the race
Which lights with joy each eager runner's face,
As the red cross which saveth men in war,
As a flame-bearded beacon seen from far
By mariners upon a storm-tossed sea,—
Such was his love for Greece and Liberty!

Byron, thy crowns are ever fresh and green:
Red leaves of rose from Sapphic Mitylene
Shall bind thy brows; the myrtle blooms for thee,
In hidden glades by lonely Castaly;
The laurels wait thy coming: all are thine,
And round thy head one perfect wreath will twine.

V.

The pine-tops rocked before the evening breeze
With the hoarse murmur of the wintry seas,
And the tall stems were streaked with amber bright;—
I wandered through the wood in wild delight,
Some startled bird, with fluttering wings and fleet,
Made snow of all the blossoms: at my feet,
Like silver crowns, the pale narcissi lay,
And small birds sang on every twining spray.
O waving trees, O forest liberty!
Within your haunts at least a man is free,
And half forgets the weary world of strife:
The blood flows hotter, and a sense of life
Wakes i' the quickening veins, while once again
The woods are filled with gods we fancied slain.
Long time I watched, and surely hoped to see
Some goat-foot Pan make merry minstrelsy
Amid the reeds! some startled Dryad-maid
In girlish flight! or lurking in the glade,
The soft brown limbs, the wanton treacherous face
Of woodland god! Queen Dian in the chase.

White-limbed and terrible, with look of pride,
And leash of boar-hounds leaping at her side!
Or Hylas mirrored in the perfect stream.

O idle heart! O fond Hellenic dream!
Ere long, with melancholy rise and swell,
The evening chimes, the convent's vesper-bell
Struck on mine ears amid the amorous flowers.
Alas! alas! these sweet and honeyed hours
Had 'whelmed my heart like some encroaching sea,
And drowned all thoughts of black Gethsemane.

VI.

O lone Ravenna! many a tale is told
Of thy great glories in the days of old:
Two thousand years have passed since thou didst see
Cæsar ride forth to royal victory.
Mighty thy name when Rome's lean eagles flew
From Britain's isles to far Euphrates blue;
And of the peoples thou wast noble queen,
Till in thy streets the Goth and Hun were seen.
Discrowned by man, deserted by the sea,
Thou sleepest, rocked in lonely misery!

No longer now upon thy swelling tide,
Pine-forest like, thy myriad galleys ride!
For where the brass-beaked ships were wont to
float,
The weary shepherd pipes his mournful note;
And the white sheep are free to come and go
Where Adria's purple waters used to flow.

O fair! O sad! O Queen uncomforted!
In ruined loveliness thou liest dead,
Alone of all thy sisters; for at last
Italia's royal warrior hath passed
Rome's lordliest entrance, and hath worn his
crown
In the high temples of the Eternal Town!
The Palatine hath welcomed back her king,
And with his name the seven mountains ring!

And Naples hath outlived her dream of pain,
And mocks her tyrant! Venice lives again,
New risen from the waters! and the cry
Of Light and Truth, of Love and Liberty,
Is heard in lordly Genoa, and where
The marble spires of Milan wound the air,
Rings from the Alps to the Sicilian shore,
And Dante's dream is now a dream no more.

But thou, Ravenna, better loved than all,
Thy ruined palaces are but a pall
That hides thy fallen greatness! and thy name
Burns like a grey and flickering candle-flame,
Beneath the noon-day splendour of the sun
Of new Italia! for the night is done,
The night of dark oppression, and the day
Hath dawned in passionate splendour: far away
The Austrian hounds are hunted from the land,
Beyond those ice-crowned citadels which stand
Girdling the plain of royal Lombardy,
From the far West unto the Eastern sea.

I know, indeed, that sons of thine have died
In Lissa's waters, by the mountain-side
Of Aspromonte, on Novara's plain,—
Nor have thy children died for thee in vain:
And yet, methinks, thou hast not drunk this wine
From grapes new-crushed of Liberty divine.
Thou hast not followed that immortal Star
Which leads the people forth to deeds of war.
Weary of life, thou liest in silent sleep,
As one who marks the lengthening shadows creep,

Careless of all the hurrying hours that run,
Mourning some day of glory, for the sun
Of freedom hath not shown to thee his face,
And thou hast caught no flambeau in the race.

Yet wake not from thy slumbers,—rest thee well,
Amidst thy fields of amber asphodel,
Thy lily-sprinkled meadows,—rest thee there,
To mock all human greatness: who would dare
To vent the paltry sorrows of his life
Before thy ruins, or to praise the strife
Of kings' ambition, and the barren pride
Of warrior nations! wert not thou the Bride
Of the wild Lord of Adria's stormy sea!
The Queen of double Empires! and to thee
Were not the nations given as thy prey!
And now—thy gates lie open night and day,
The grass grows green on every tower and hall,
The ghastly fig hath cleft thy bastioned wall;
And where thy mailéd warriors stood at rest
The midnight owl hath made her secret nest.
O fallen! fallen! from thy high estate,
O city trammelled in the toils of Fate,
Doth nought remain of all thy glorious days,
But a dull shield, a crown of withered bays!

Yet who beneath this night of wars and fears,
From tranquil tower can watch the coming years;
Who can foretell what joys the day shall bring,
Or why before the dawn the linnets sing?
Thou, even thou, mayst wake, as wakes the rose
To crimson splendour from its grave of snows;
As the rich corn-fields rise to red and gold
From these brown lands, now stiff with Winter's cold
As from the storm-rack comes a perfect star!

O much-loved city! I have wandered far
From the wave-circled islands of my home,
Have seen the gloomy mystery of the Dome
Rise slowly from the drear Campagna's way,
Clothed in the royal purple of the day:
I from the city of the violet crown
Have watched the sun by Corinth's hill go down,
And marked the "myriad laughter" of the sea
From starlit hills of flower-starred Arkady;
Yet back to thee returns my perfect love,
As to its forest-nest the evening dove.

O poet's city! one who scarce has seen
Some twenty summers cast their doublets green,
For Autumn's livery, would seek in vain
To wake his lyre to sing a louder strain,
Or tell thy days of glory;—poor indeed
Is the low murmur of the shepherd's reed,
Where the loud clarion's blast should shake the sky,
And flame across the heavens! and to try
Such lofty themes were folly: yet I know
That never felt my heart a nobler glow
Than when I woke the silence of thy street
With clamorous trampling of my horse's feet,
And saw the city which now I try to sing,
After long days of weary travelling.

VII.

Adieu, Ravenna! but a year ago,
I stood and watched the crimson sunset glow
From the lone chapel on thy marshy plain:
The sky was as a shield that caught the stain
Of blood and battle from the dying sun,
And in the west the circling clouds had spun

A royal robe, which some great God might wear,
While into ocean-seas of purple air
Sank the gold galley of the Lord of Light.

Yet here the gentle stillness of the night
Brings back the swelling tide of memory,
And wakes again my passionate love for thee:
Now is the Spring of Love, yet soon will come
On meadow and tree the Summer's lordly bloom:
And soon the grass with brighter flowers will blow,
And send up lilies for some boy to mow.
Then before long the Summer's conqueror,
Rich Autumn-time, the season's usurer,
Will lend his hoarded gold to all the trees,
And see it scattered by the spendthrift breeze;
And after that the Winter cold and drear.
So runs the perfect cycle of the year.
And so from youth to manhood do we go,
And fall to weary days and locks of snow.
Love only knows no winter; never dies:
Nor cares for frowning storms or leaden skies.
And mine for thee shall never pass away,
Though my weak lips may falter in my lay.

Adieu! Adieu! yon silent evening star,
The night's ambassador, doth gleam afar,
And bid the shepherd bring his flocks to fold.
Perchance before our inland seas of gold
Are garnered by the reapers into sheaves,
Perchance before I see the Autumn leaves,
I may behold thy city; and lay down
Low at thy feet the poet's laurel crown.

Adieu! Adieu! yon silver lamp, the moon,
Which turns our midnight into perfect noon,
Doth surely light thy towers, guarding well
Where Dante sleeps, where Byron loved to dwell.

Poems

HÉLAS!

To drift with every passion till my soul
Is a stringed lute on which all winds can play,
Is it for this that I have given away
Mine ancient wisdom, and austere control?—
Methinks my life is a twice-written scroll
Scrawled over on some boyish holiday
With idle songs for pipe and virelay
Which do but mar the secret of the whole.
Surely there was a time I might have trod
The sunlit heights, and from life's dissonance
Struck one clear chord to reach the ears of God;
Is that time dead? lo! with a little rod
I did but touch the honey of romance—
And must I lose a soul's inheritance?

Eleutheria

SONNET TO LIBERTY.

Not that I love thy children, whose dull eyes
See nothing save their own unlovely woe,
Whose minds know nothing, nothing care to
know,—
But that the roar of thy Democracies,
Thy reigns of Terror, thy great Anarchies,
Mirror my wildest passions like the sea,-
And give my rage a brother——! Liberty!
For his sake only do thy dissonant cries
Delight my discreet soul, else might all kings
By bloody knout or treacherous cannonades
Rob nations of their rights inviolate
And I remain unmoved—and yet, and yet,
These Christs that die upon the barricades,
God knows it I am with them, in some things.

AVE IMPERATRIX.

Set in this stormy Northern sea,
  Queen of these restless fields of tide,
England! what shall men say of thee,
  Before whose feet the worlds divide?

The earth, a brittle globe of glass,
  Lies in the hollow of thy hand,
And through its heart of crystal pass,
  Like shadows through a twilight land,

The spears of crimson-suited war,
  The long white-crested waves of fight,
And all the deadly fires which are
  The torches of the lords of Night.

The yellow leopards, strained and lean,
  The treacherous Russian knows so well,
With gaping blackened jaws are seen
  Leap through the hail of screaming shell.

The strong sea-lion of England's wars
Hath left his sapphire cave of sea,
To battle with the storm that mars
The star of England's chivalry.

The brazen-throated clarion blows
Across the Pathan's reedy fen,
And the high steeps of Indian snows
Shake to the tread of armèd men.

And many an Afghan chief, who lies
Beneath his cool pomegranate-trees,
Clutches his sword in fierce surmise
When on the mountain-side he sees

The fleet-foot Marri scout, who comes
To tell how he hath heard afar
The measured roll of English drums
Beat at the gates of Kandahar.

For southern wind and east wind meet
Where, girt and crowned by sword and fire,
England with bare and bloody feet
Climbs the steep road of wide empire.

O lonely Himalayan height,
  Gray pillar of the Indian sky,
Where saw'st thou last in clanging fight,
  Our wingèd dogs of Victory?

The almond groves of Samarcand,
  Bokhara, where red lilies blow,
And Oxus, by whose yellow sand
  The grave white-turbaned merchants go:

And on from thence to Ispahan,
  The gilded garden of the sun,
Whence the long dusty caravan
  Brings cedar and vermilion;

And that dread city of Cabool
  Set at the mountain's scarpèd feet,
Whose marble tanks are ever full
  With water for the noon-day heat:

Where through the narrow straight Bazaar
  A little maid Circassian
Is led, a present from the Czar
  Unto some old and bearded khan,—

Here have our wild war-eagles flown,
And flapped wide wings in fiery fight;
But the sad dove, that sits alone
In England—she hath no delight.

In vain the laughing girl will lean
To greet her love with love-lit eyes:
Down in some treacherous black ravine,
Clutching his flag, the dead boy lies.

And many a moon and sun will see
The lingering wistful children wait
To climb upon their father's knee;
And in each house made desolate

Pale women who have lost their lord
Will kiss the relics of the slain—
Some tarnished epaulet—some sword—
Poor toys to soothe such anguished pain.

For not in quiet English fields
Are these, our brothers, laid to rest.
Where we might deck their broken shields
With all the flowers the dead love best.

For some are by the Delhi walls,
  And many in the Afghan land,
And many where the Ganges falls
  Through seven mouths of shifting sand.

And some in Russian waters lie,
  And others in the seas which are
The portals to the East, or by
  The wind-swept heights of Trafalgar.

O wandering graves! O restless sleep!
  O silence of the sunless day!
O still ravine! O stormy deep!
  Give up your prey! Give up your prey!

And thou whose wounds are never healed,
  Whose weary race is never won,
O Cromwell's England! must thou yield
  For every inch of ground a son?

Go! crown with thorns thy gold-crowned head,
  Change thy glad song to song of pain;
Wind and wild wave have got thy dead,
  And will not yield them back again.

Wave and wild wind and foreign shore
  Possess the flower of English land—
Lips that thy lips shall kiss no more,
  Hands that shall never clasp thy hand.

What profit now that we have bound
  The whole round world with net of gold,
If hidden in our heart is found
  The care that groweth never old?

What profit that our galleys ride,
  Pine-forest-like, on every main?
Ruin and wreck are at our side,
  Grim warders of the House of pain.

Where are the brave, the strong, the fleet?
  Where is our English chivalry?
Wild grasses are their burial-sheet,
  And sobbing waves their threnody.

O loved ones lying far away,
  What word of love can dead lips send!
O wasted dust! O senseless clay!
  Is this the end! is this the end!

Peace, peace! we wrong the noble dead
To vex their solemn slumber so:
Though childless, and with thorn-crowned head,
Up the steep road must England go,

Yet when this fiery web is spun,
Her watchmen shall decry from far
The young Republic like a sun
Rise from these crimson seas of war.

TO MILTON.

Milton! I think thy spirit hath passed away
From these white cliffs, and high embattled-towers;
This gorgeous fiery-colored world of ours
Seems fallen into ashes dull and gray,
And the age changed unto a mimic play
Wherein we waste our else too-crowded hours:
For all our pomp and pageantry and powers
We are but fit to delve the common clay,
Seeing this little isle on which we stand,
This England, this sea-lion of the sea,
By ignorant demagogues is held in fee,
Who love her not: Dear God! is this the land
Which bare a triple empire in her hand
When Cromwell spake the word Democracy?

LOUIS NAPOLEON.

Eagle of Austerlitz! where were thy wings
When far away upon a barbarous strand,
In fight unequal, by an obscure hand,
Fell the last scion of thy brood of Kings!

Poor boy! thou wilt not flaunt thy cloak of red,
Nor ride in state through Paris in the van
Of thy returning legions, but instead
Thy mother France, free and republican,

Shall on thy dead and crownless forehead place
The better laurels of a soldier's crown,
That not dishonored should thy soul go down
To tell the mighty Sire of thy race

That France hath kissed the mouth of Liberty,
And found it sweeter than his honeyed bees,
And that the giant wave Democracy
Breaks on the shores where Kings lay couched at ease.

SONNET.

ON THE MASSACRE OF THE CHRISTIANS IN BULGARIA.

Christ, dost Thou live indeed? or are Thy bones
Still straightened in their rock-hewn sepulchre?
And was Thy Rising only dreamed by her
Whose love of Thee for all her sin atones?
For here the air is horrid with men's groans,
The priests who call upon Thy name are slain,
Dost Thou not hear the bitter wail of pain
From those whose children lie upon the stones?
Come down, O Son of God! incestuous gloom
Curtains the land, and through the starless night
Over Thy Cross the Crescent moon I see!
If Thou in very truth didst burst the tomb
Come down, O Son of Man! and show Thy might
Lest Mahomet be crowned instead of Thee!

QUANTUM MUTATA.

There was a time in Europe long ago,
When no man died for freedom anywhere,
But England's lion leaping from its lair
Laid hands on the oppressor! it was so
While England could a great Republic show.
Witness the men of Piedmont, chiefest care
Of Cromwell, when with impotent despair
The Pontiff in his painted portico
Trembled before our stern embassadors.
How comes it then that from such high estate
We have thus fallen, save that Luxury
With barren merchandise piles up the gate
Where nobler thoughts and deeds should enter by:
Else might we still be Milton's heritors.

LIBERTATIS SACRA FAMES.

Albeit nurtured in democracy,
And liking best that state republican
Where every man is Kinglike and no man
Is crowned above his fellows, yet I see,
Spite of this modern fret for Liberty,
Better the rule of One, whom all obey,
Than to let clamorous demagogues betray
Our freedom with the kiss of anarchy.
Wherefore I love them not whose hands profane
Plant the red flag upon the piled-up street
For no right cause, beneath whose ignorant reign
Arts, Culture, Reverence, Honor, all things fade,
Save Treason and the dagger of her trade,
And Murder with his silent bloody feet.

THEORETIKOS.

This mighty empire hath but feet of clay;
Of all its ancient chivalry and might
Our little island is forsaken quite:
Some enemy hath stolen its crown of bay,
And from its hills that voice hath passed away
Which spake of Freedom: O come out of it,
Come out of it, my Soul, thou art not fit
For this vile traffic-house, where day by day
Wisdom and reverence are sold at mart,
And the rude people rage with ignorant cries
Against an heritage of centuries.
It mars my calm: wherefore in dreams of Art
And loftiest culture I would stand apart,
Neither for God, nor for His enemies.

The Garden of Eros

THE GARDEN OF EROS.

It is full summer now, the heart of June,
Not yet the sun-burnt reapers are a-stir
Upon the upland meadow where too soon
Rich autumn time, the season's usurer,
Will lend his hoarded gold to all the trees,
And see his treasure scattered by the wild and
spendthrift breeze.

Too soon indeed! yet here the daffodil,
That love-child of the Spring, has lingered on
To vex the rose with jealousy, and still
The harebell spreads her azure pavilion,
And like a strayed and wandering reveller
Abandoned of its brothers, whom long since
June's messenger

The missel-thrush has frighted from the glade,
One pale narcissus loiters fearfully
Close to a shadowy nook, where half afraid
Of their own loveliness some violets lie

That will not look the gold sun in the face
For fear of too much splendour,—ah! methinks
it is a place

Which should be trodden by Persephone
When wearied of the flowerless fields of Dis!
Or danced on by the lads of Arcady!
The hidden secret of eternal bliss
Known to the Grecian here a man might find,
Ah! you and I may find it now if Love and
Sleep be kind.

There are the flowers which mourning Herakles
Strewed on the tomb of Hylas, columbine,
Its white doves all a-flutter where the breeze
Kissed them too harshly, the small celandine,
That yellow-kirtled chorister of eve,
And lilac lady's-smock,—but let them bloom
alone and leave

Yon spired holly-hock red-crocketed
To sway its silent chimes, else must the bee,
Its little bell-ringer, go seek instead
Some other pleasaunce; the anemone
That weeps at daybreak, like a silly girl
Before her love, and hardly lets the butterflies
unfurl

Their painted wings beside it,—bid it pine
In pale virginity; the winter snow
Will suit it better than those lips of thine
Whose fires would but scorch it, rather go
And pluck that amorous flower which blooms alone,
Fed by the pander wind with dust of kisses not its own.

The trumpet-mouths of red convolvulus
So dear to maidens, creamy meadow-sweet
Whiter than Juno's throat and odorous
As all Arabia, hyacinths the feet
Of Huntress Dian would be loath to mar
For any dappled fawn,—pluck these, and those fond flowers which are

Fairer than what Queen Venus trod upon
Beneath the pines of Ida, eucharis,
That morning star which does not dread the sun,
And budding marjoram which but to kiss
Would sweeten Cytheræa's lips and make
Adonis jealous,—these for thy head,—and for thy girdle take

Yon curving spray of purple clematis
  Whose gorgeous dye outflames the Tyrian King,
And fox-gloves with their nodding chalices,
  But that one narciss which the startled Spring
Let from her kirtle fall when first she heard
In her own woods the wild tempestuous song of summer's bird,

Ah! leave it for a subtle memory
  Of those sweet tremulous days of rain and sun,
When April laughed between her tears to see
  The early primrose with shy footsteps run
From the gnarled oak-tree roots till all the wold,
Spite of its brown and trampled leaves, grew bright with shimmering gold.

Nay, pluck it too, it is not half so sweet
  As thou thyself, my soul's idolatry!
And when thou art a-wearied at thy feet
  Shall oxlips weave their brightest tapestry,
For thee the woodbine shall forget its pride
And veil its tangled whorls, and thou shalt walk on daisies pied.

And I will cut a reed by yonder spring
  And make the wood-gods jealous, and old Pan
Wonder what young intruder dares to sing
  In these still haunts, where never foot of man
Should tread at evening, lest he chance to spy
The marble limbs of Artemis and all her
    company.

And I will tell thee why the jacinth wears
  Such dread embroidery of dolorous moan,
And why the hapless nightingale forbears
  To sing her song at noon, but weeps alone
When the fleet swallow sleeps, and rich men
    feast,
And why the laurel trembles when she sees the
    lightening east.

And I will sing how sad Proserpina
  Unto a grave and gloomy Lord was wed,
And lure the silver-breasted Helena
  Back from the lotus meadows of the dead,
So shalt thou see that awful loveliness
For which two mighty Hosts met fearfully in
    war's abyss!

And then I'll pipe to thee that Grecian tale
How Cynthia loves the lad Endymion,
And hidden in a gray and misty veil
Hies to the cliffs of Latmos, once the Sun
Leaps from his ocean bed, in fruitless chase
Of those pale flying feet which fade away in his embrace.

And if my flute can breathe sweet melody,
We may behold Her face who long ago
Dwelt among men by the Ægean sea,
And whose sad house with pillaged portico
And friezeless wall and columns toppled down
Looms o'er the ruins of that fair and violet-cinctured town.

Spirit of Beauty! tarry still a-while,
They are not dead, thine ancient votaries,
Some few there are to whom thy radiant smile
Is better than a thousand victories,
Though all the nobly slain of Waterloo
Rise up in wrath against them! tarry still, there are a few,

Who for thy sake would give their manlihood
And consecrate their being, I at least
Have done so, made thy lips my daily food,
And in thy temples found a goodlier feast
Then this starved age can give me, spite of all
Its new-found creeds so skeptical and so dogmatical.

Here not Cephissos, not Ilissos flows,
The woods of white Colonos are not here,
On our bleak hills the olive never blows,
No simple priest conducts his lowing steer
Up the steep marble way, nor through the town
Do laughing maidens bear to thee the crocus-flowered gown.

Yet tarry! for the boy who loved thee best,
Whose very name should be a memory
To make thee linger, sleeps in silent rest
Beneath the Roman walls, and melody
Still mourns her sweetest lyre, none can play
The lute of Adonais, with his lips Song passed away.

Nay, when Keats died the Muses still had left
One silver voice to sing his threnody,
But ah! too soon of it we were bereft
When on that riven night and stormy sea
Panthea claimed her singer as her own,
And slew the mouth that praised her; since
which time we walk alone,

Save for that fiery heart, that morning star
Of re-arisen England, whose clear eye
Saw from our tottering throne and waste of war
The grand Greek limbs of young Democracy
Rise mightily like Hesperus and bring
The great Republic! him at least thy love hath
taught to sing,

And he hath been with thee at Thessaly,
And seen white Atalanta fleet of foot
In passionless and fierce virginity
Hunting the tuskèd boar, his honeyed lute
Hath pierced the cavern of the hollow hill,
And Venus laughs to know one knee will bow
before her still.

And he hath kissed the lips of Proserpine,
And sung the Galilæan's requiem,
That wounded forehead dashed with blood and wine
He hath discrowned, the Ancient Gods in him
Have found their last, most ardent worshipper,
And the new Sign grows gray and dim before its conqueror.

Spirit of Beauty! tarry with us still,
It is not quenched the torch of poesy,
The star that shook above the Eastern hill
Holds unassailed its argent armory
From all the gathering gloom and fretful fight—
O tarry with us still! for through the long and common night,

Morris, our sweet and simple Chaucer's child,
Dear heritor of Spenser's tuneful reed,
With soft and sylvan pipe has oft beguiled
The weary soul of man in troublous need,
And from the far and flowerless fields of ice
Has brought fair flowers meet to make an earthly paradise.

We know them all, Gudrun the strong man's
bride,
Aslaug and Olafson we know them all,
How giant Grettir fought and Sigurd died,
And what enchantment held the king in thrall
When lonely Brynhild wrestled with the powers
That war against all passion, ah! how oft
through summer hours,

Long listless summer hours when the noon
Being enamored of a damask rose
Forgets to journey westward, till the moon
The pale usurper of its tribute grows
From a thin sickle to a silver shield
And chides its loitering car—how oft, in some
cool grassy field

Far from the cricket-ground and noisy eight
At Bagley, where the rustling bluebells come
Almost before the blackbird finds a mate
And overstay the swallow, and the hum
Of many murmuring bees flits through the
leaves,
Have I lain poring on the dreamy tales his
fancy weaves,

And through their unreal woes and mimic pain
Wept for myself, and so was purified,
And in their simple mirth grew glad again;
For as I sailed upon that pictured tide
The strength and splendour of the storm was mine
Without the storm's red ruin, for the singer is divine.

The little laugh of water falling down
Is not so musical, the clammy gold
Close hoarded in the tiny waxen town
Has less of sweetness in it, and the old
Half-withered reeds that waved in Arcady
Touched by his lips break forth again to fresher harmony.

Spirit of Beauty tarry yet a-while!
Although the cheating merchants of the mart
With iron roads profane our lovely isle,
And break on whirling wheels the limbs of Art,
Ay! though the crowded factories beget
The blind-worm Ignorance that slays the soul,
O tarry yet!

For One at least there is,—He bears his name
From Dante and the seraph Gabriel,—
Whose double laurels burn with deathless flame
To light thine altar; He too loves thee well
Who saw old Merlin lured in Vivien's snare,
And the white feet of angels coming down the
golden stair.

Loves thee so well, that all the world for him
A gorgeous-colored vestiture must wear,
And Sorrow take a purple diadem,
Or else be no more Sorrow, and Despair
Gild its own thorns, and Pain, like Adon, be
Even in anguish beautiful;—such is the empery

Which Painters hold, and such the heritage
This gentle solemn Spirit doth possess,
Being a better mirror of his age
In all his pity, love, and weariness,
Than those who can but copy common things,
And leave the soul unpainted with its mighty
questionings.

But they are few, and all romance has flown,
  And men can prophesy about the sun,
And lecture on his arrows—how, alone,
  Through a waste void the soulless atoms run,
How from each tree its weeping nymph has fled,
And that no more 'mid English reeds a Naïad
    shows her head.

Methinks these new Actæons boast too soon
  That they have spied on beauty; what if we
Have analysed the rainbow, robbed the moon
  Of her most ancient, chastest mystery,
Shall I, the last Endymion, lose all hope
Because rude eyes peer at my mistress through
    a telescope!

What profit if this scientific age
  Burst through our gates with all its retinue
Of modern miracles! Can it assuage
  One lover's breaking heart? what can it do
To make one life more beautiful, one day
More god-like in its period? but now the Age
    of Clay

Returns in horrid cycle, and the earth
  Hath borne again a noisy progeny
Of ignorant Titans, whose ungodly birth
  Hurls them against the august hierarchy
Which sat upon Olympus, to the Dust
They have appealed, and to that barren arbiter
    they must

Repair for judgment, let them, if they can,
  From Natural Warfare and insensate Chance,
Create the new ideal rule for man!
  Methinks that was not my inheritance;
For I was nurtured otherwise, my soul
Passes from higher heights of life to a more
    supreme goal.

Lo! while we spake the earth did turn away
  Her visage from the God, and Hecate's boat
Rose silver-laden, till the jealous day
  Blew all its torches out: I did not note
The waning hours, to young Endymions
Time's palsied fingers count in vain his rosary
    of suns!—

Mark how the yellow iris wearily
Leans back its throat, as though it would be kissed
By its false chamberer, the dragon-fly,
Who, like a blue vein on a girl's white wrist,
Sleeps on that snowy primrose of the night,
Which 'gins to flush with crimson shame, and die beneath the light.

Come let us go, against the pallid shield
Of the wan sky the almond blossoms gleam,
The corn-crake nested in the unmown field
Answers its mate, across the misty stream
On fitful wing the startled curlews fly,
And in his sedgy bed the lark, for joy that Day is nigh,

Scatters the pearlèd dew from off the grass,
In tremulous ecstasy to greet the sun,
Who soon in gilded panoply will pass
Forth from yon orange-curtained pavilion
Hung in the burning east, see, the red rim
O'ertops the expectant hills! it is the God! for love of him

Already the shrill lark is out of sight,
  Flooding with waves of song this silent dell,—
Ah! there is something more in that bird's flight
  Than could be tested in a crucible!—
But the air freshens, let us go,—why soon
The woodmen will be here; how we have lived
    this night of June!

Rosa Mystica

REQUIESCAT.

Tread lightly, she is near
  Under the snow,
Speak gently, she can hear
  The daisies grow.

All her bright golden hair
  Tarnished with rust,
She that was young and fair
  Fallen to dust.

Lily-like, white as snow,
  She hardly knew
She was a woman, so
  Sweetly she grew.

Coffin-board, heavy stone,
  Lie on her breast,
I vex my heart alone
  She is at rest.

Peace, Peace, she cannot hear
  Lyre or sonnet,
All my life's buried here,
  Heap earth upon it.

AVIGNON.

SALVE SATURNIA TELLUS.

SONNET ON APPROACHING ITALY.

I reached the Alps: the soul within me burned
  Italia, my Italia, at thy name:
  And when from out the mountain's heart I came
And saw the land for which my life had yearned,
I laughed as one who some great prize had earned:
  And musing on the story of thy fame
  I watched the day, till marked with wounds of flame
The turquoise sky to burnished gold was turned,
The pine-trees waved as waves a woman's hair,
  And in the orchards every twining spray
  Was breaking into flakes of blossoming foam:
But when I knew that far away at Rome
  In evil bonds a second Peter lay,
  I wept to see the land so very fair.

TURIN.

SAN MINIATO.

See, I have climbed the mountain side
  Up to this holy house of God,
  Where once that Angel-Painter trod
Who saw the heavens opened wide,

And throned upon the crescent moon
  The Virginal white Queen of Grace,—
  Mary! could I but see thy face
Death could not come at all too soon.

O crowned by God with thorns and pain!
  Mother of Christ! O mystic wife!
  My heart is weary of this life
And over-sad to sing again.

O crowned by God with love and flame!
  O crowned by Christ the Holy One!
  O listen ere the searching sun
Show to the world my sin and shame.

AVE MARIA PLENA GRATIA.

Was this His coming! I had hoped to see
A scene of wondrous glory, as was told
Of some great God who in a rain of gold
Broke open bars and fell on Danae:
Or a dread vision as when Semele
Sickening for love and unappeased desire
Prayed to see God's clear body, and the fire
Caught her white limbs and slew her utterly:
With such glad dreams I sought this holy place,
And now with wondering eyes and heart I stand
Before this supreme mystery of Love:
A kneeling girl with passionless pale face,
An angel with a lily in his hand,
And over both with outstretched wings the Dove.

FLORENCE.

ITALIA.

Italia! thou art fallen, though with sheen
  Of battle-spears thy clamorous armies stride
  From the North Alps to the Sicilian tide!
Ay! fallen, though the nations hail thee Queen
Because rich gold in every town is seen,
  And on thy sapphire lake, in tossing pride
  Of wind-filled vans thy myriad galleys ride
Beneath one flag of red and white and green.
O Fair and Strong! O Strong and Fair in vain!
  Look southward where Rome's desecrated town
  Lies mourning for her God-anointed King?
Look heavenward! shall God allow this thing?
  Nay! but some flame-girt Raphael shall come down,
  And smite the Spoiler with the sword of pain.

VENICE.

SONNET.

WRITTEN IN HOLY WEEK AT GENOA.

I wandered in Scoglietto's green retreat,
The oranges on each o'erhanging spray
Burned as bright lamps of gold to shame the day;
Some startled bird with fluttering wings and fleet
Made snow of all the blossoms, at my feet
Like silver moons the pale narcissi lay:
And the curved waves that streaked the sapphire bay
Laughed i' the sun, and life seemed very sweet.
Outside the young boy-priest passed singing clear,
"Jesus the Son of Mary has been slain,
O come and fill his sepulchre with flowers."
Ah, God! Ah, God! those dear Hellenic hours
Had drowned all memory of thy bitter pain,
The Cross, the Crown, the Soldiers, and the Spear.

ROME UNVISITED.

I.

The corn has turned from gray to red,
  Since first my spirit wandered forth
  From the drear cities of the north,
And to Italia's mountains fled.

And here I set my face toward home,
  For all my pilgrimage is done,
  Although, methinks, yon blood-red sun
Marshals the way to Holy Rome.

O Blessèd Lady, who dost hold
  Upon the seven hills thy reign!
  O Mother without blot or stain,
Crowned with bright crowns of triple gold!

O Roma, Roma, at thy feet
  I lay this barren gift of song!
  For, ah! the way is steep and long
That leads unto thy sacred street..

II.

And yet what joy it were for me
To turn my feet unto the south,
And journeying toward the Tiber mouth
To kneel again at Fiesole!

And wandering through the tangled pines
That break the gold of Arno's stream,
To see the purple mist and gleam
Of morning on the Apennines.

By many a vineyard-hidden home,
Orchard, and olive-garden gray,
Till from the drear Campagna's way
The seven hills bear up the dome!

III.

A pilgrim from the northern seas—
What joy for me to seek alone
The wondrous Temple, and the throne
Of Him who holds the awful keys!

When, bright with purple and with gold,
  Come priest and holy Cardinal,
  And borne above the heads of all
The gentle Shepherd of the Fold.

O joy to see before I die
  The only God-anointed King,
  And hear the silver trumpets ring
A triumph as He passes by.

Or at the altar of the shrine
  Holds high the mystic sacrifice,
  And shows a God to human eyes
Beneath the veil of bread and wine.

IV.

For lo, what changes time can bring!
  The cycles of revolving years
  May free my heart from all its fears,—
And teach my lips a song to sing.

Before yon field of trembling gold
  Is garnered into dusty sheaves,
  Or ere the autumn's scarlet leaves
Flutter as birds adown the wold,

I may have run the glorious race,
  And caught the torch while yet aflame,
  And called upon the holy name
Of Him who now doth hide His face.

ARONA.

URBS SACRA ÆTERNA.

Rome! what a scroll of History thine has been!
In the first days thy sword republican
Ruled the whole world for many an age's span:
Then of thy peoples thou wert crownèd Queen.
Till in thy streets the bearded Goth was seen;
And now upon thy walls the breezes fan
(Ah, city crowned by God, discrowned by man!
The hated flag of red and white and green.
When was thy glory! when in search for power
Thine eagles flew to greet the double sun,
And all the nations trembled at thy rod?
Nay, but thy glory tarried for this hour,
When pilgrims kneel before the Holy One,
The prisoned shepherd of the Church of God.

SONNET.

ON HEARING THE DIES IRAE SUNG IN THE SISTINE CHAPEL.

Nay, Lord, not thus! white lilies in the spring,
Sad olive-groves, or silver-breasted dove,
Teach me more clearly of Thy life and love
Than terrors of red flame and thundering.
The empurpled vines dear memories of Thee bring:
A bird at evening flying to its nest,
Tells me of One who had no place of rest:
I think it is of Thee the sparrows sing.
Come rather on some autumn afternoon,
When red and brown are burnished on the leaves,
And the fields echo to the gleaner's song,
Come when the splendid fulness of the moon
Looks down upon the rows of golden sheaves,
And reap Thy harvest: we have waited long.

EASTER DAY.

The silver trumpets rang across the Dome:
The people knelt upon the ground with awe:
And borne upon the necks of men I saw,
Like some great God, the Holy Lord of Rome.
Priest-like, he wore a robe more white than foam,
And, king-like, swathed himself in royal red,
Three crowns of gold rose high upon his head:
In splendor and in light the Pope passed home.
My heart stole back across wide wastes of years
To One who wandered by a lonely sea,
And sought in vain for any place of rest:
"Foxes have holes, and every bird its nest,
I, only I, must wander wearily,
And bruise My feet, and drink wine salt with tears."

E TENEBRIS.

Come down, O Christ, and help me! reach thy hand,
For I am drowning in a stormier sea
Than Simon on Thy lake of Galilee:
The wine of life is spilt upon the sand,
My heart is as some famine-murdered land,
Whence all good things have perished utterly,
And well I know my soul in Hell must lie
If I this night before God's throne should stand.
"He sleeps perchance, or rideth to the chase,
Like Baal, when his prophets howled that name
From morn to noon on Carmel's smitten height."
Nay, peace, I shall behold before the night,
The feet of brass, the robe more white than flame,
The wounded hands, the weary human face.

VITA NUOVA.

I stood by the unvintageable sea
  Till the wet waves drenched face and hair
    with spray,
  The long red fires of the dying day
Burned in the west; the wind piped drearily;
And to the land the clamorous gulls did flee:
  "Alas!" I cried, "my life is full of pain,
    And who can garner fruit or golden grain,
From these waste fields which travail ceaselessly!"
My nets gaped wide with many a break and flaw
  Nathless I threw them as my final cast
  Into the sea, and waited for the end.
When lo! a sudden glory! and I saw
  The argent splendor of white limbs ascend,
  And in that joy forgot my tortured past.

MADONNA MIA.

A lily-girl, not made for this world's pain,
With brown, soft hair close braided by her ears,
  And longing eyes half veiled by slumb'rous
    tears
Like bluest water seen through mists of rain;
Pale cheeks whereon no love hath left its stain,
  Red underlip drawn in for fear of love,
  And white throat, whiter than the silvered
    dove,
Through whose wan marble creeps one purple
    vein.
Yet, though my lips shall praise her without
    cease,
  Even to kiss her feet I am not bold,
  Being o'ershadowed by the wings of awe.
Like Dante, when he stood with Beatrice
  Beneath the flaming Lion's breast and saw
  The seventh Crystal, and the Stair of Gold.

THE NEW HELEN.

Where hast thou been since round the walls of Troy
The sons of God fought in that great emprise?
Why dost thou walk our common earth again?
Hast thou forgotten that impassioned boy,
His purple galley, and his Tyrian men,
And treacherous Aphrodite's mocking eyes?
For surely it was thou, who, like a star
Hung in the silver silence of the night,
Didst lure the Old World chivalry and might
Into the clamorous crimson waves of war!

Or didst thou rule the fire-laden moon?
In amorous Sidon was thy temple built
Over the light and laughter of the sea?
Where, behind lattice scarlet-wrought and gilt,
Some brown-limbed girl did weave thee tapestry,

All through the waste and wearied hours of
noon;
Till her wan cheek with flame of passion burned,
And she rose up the sea-washed lips to kiss
Of some glad Cyprian sailor, safe returned
From Calpé and the cliffs of Herakles!

No! thou art Helen, and none other one!
It was for thee that young Sarpedôn died,
And Memnôn's manhood was untimely
spent;
It was for thee gold-crested Hector tried
With Thetis' child that evil race to run,
In the last year of thy beleaguerment;
Ay! even now the glory of thy fame
Burns in those fields of trampled asphodel,
Where the high lords whom Ilion knew so well
Clash ghostly shields, and call upon thy name.

Where hast thou been? in that enchanted land
Whose slumbering vales forlorn Calypso knew,
Where never mower rose to greet the day
But all unswathed the trammeling grasses
grew,
And the sad shepherd saw the tall corn stand
Till summer's red had changed to withered
gray?

Didst thou lie there by some Lethæan stream
  Deep brooding on thine ancient memory,
The crash of broken spears, the fiery gleam
  From shivered helm, the Grecian battle-cry?

Nay, thou wert hidden in that hollow hill
  With one who is forgotten utterly,
    That discrowned Queen men call the Erycine;
  Hidden away that never might'st thou see
    The face of her, before whose mouldering shrine
  To-day at Rome the silent nations kneel;
Who gat from joy no joyous gladdening,
    But only Love's intolerable pain,
    Only a sword to pierce her heart in twain,
Only the bitterness of child-bearing.

The lotos-leaves which heal the wounds of Death
  Lie in thy hand; O, be thou kind to me,
    While yet I know the summer of my days;
For hardly can my tremulous lips draw breath
    To fill the silver trumpet with thy praise,
  So bowed am I before thy mystery;

So bowed and broken on Love's terrible wheel,
That I have lost all hope and heart to sing,
Yet care I not what ruin time may bring
If in thy temple thou wilt let me kneel.

Alas, alas, thou wilt not tarry here,
But, like that bird, the servant of the sun,
Who flies before the north wind and the home.
So wilt thou fly our evil land and drear,
Back to the tower of thine old delight,
And the red lips of young Euphorion;
Nor shall I ever see thy face again,
But in this poisonous garden must I stay,
Crowning my brows with the thorn-crown of pain,
Till all my loveless life shall pass away.

O Helen! Helen! Helen! yet awhile,
Yet for a little while, O tarry here,
Till the dawn cometh and the shadows flee!
For in the gladsome sunlight of thy smile
Of heaven or hell I have no thought or fear,
Seeing I know no other god but thee:

No other god save him, before whose feet
In nets of gold the tired planets move,
The incarnate spirit of spiritual love
Who in thy body holds his joyous seat.

Thou wert not born as common women are!
But girt with silver splendor of the foam,
Didst from the depths of sapphire seas arise!
And at thy coming some immortal star,
Bearded with flame, blazed in the Eastern skies;
And waked the shepherds on thine island home.
Thou shalt not die! no asps of Egypt creep
Close at thy heels to taint the delicate air;
No sullen-blooming poppies stain thy hair,
Those scarlet heralds of eternal sleep.

Lily of love, pure and inviolate!
Tower of ivory! red rose of fire!
Thou hast come down our darkness to illume:

For we, close-caught in the wide nets of Fate,
Wearied with waiting for the World's Desire,
Aimlessly wandered in the house of gloom.
Aimlessly sought some slumberous anodyne
For wasted lives, for lingering wretchedness,
Till we beheld thy re-arisen shrine,
And the white glory of thy loveliness.

The Burden of Itys

THE BURDEN OF ITYS.

This English Thames is holier far than Rome,
  Those harebells like a sudden flush of sea
Breaking across the woodland, with the foam
  Of meadow-sweet and white anemone
To fleck their blue waves,—God is likelier there,
Than hidden in that crystal-hearted star the pale
    monks bear!

Those violet-gleaming butterflies that take
  Yon creamy lily for their pavilion
Are monsignores, and where the rushes shake
  A lazy pike lies basking in the sun
His eyes half-shut,—He is some mitred old
Bishop *in partibus!* look at those gaudy scales
    all green and gold!

The wind the restless prisoner of the trees
  Does well for Palæstrina, one would say
The mighty master's hands were on the keys
  Of the Maria organ, which they play

When early on some sapphire Easter morn
In a high litter red as blood or sin the Pope is borne

From his dark house out to the balcony
Above the bronze gates and the crowded square,
Whose very fountains seem for ecstasy
To toss their silver lances in the air,
And stretching out weak hands to East and West
In vain sends peace to peaceless lands, to restless nations rest.

Is not yon lingering orange afterglow
That stays to vex the moon more fair than all
Rome's lordliest pageants! strange, a year ago
I knelt before some crimson Cardinal
Who bare the Host across the Esquiline,
And now—those common poppies in the wheat seem twice as fine.

The blue-green beanfields yonder, tremulous
With the last shower, sweeter perfume bring
Through this cool evening than the odorous
Flame-jewelled censers the young deacons swing.

When the gray priest unlocks the curtained
shrine,
And makes God's body from the common fruit
of corn and vine.

Poor Fra Giovanni bawling at the mass
Were out of tune now, for a small brown bird
Sings overhead, and through the long cool grass
I see that throbbing throat which once I heard
On starlit hills of flower-starred Arcady,
Once where the white and crescent sand of Sal-
amis meets the sea.

Sweet is the swallow twittering on the eaves
At daybreak, when the mower whets his
scythe,
And stock-doves murmur, and the milkmaid
leaves
Her little lonely bed, and carols blithe
To see the heavy-lowing cattle wait
Stretching their huge and dripping mouths
across the farmyard gate.

And sweet the hops upon the Kentish leas,
  And sweet the wind that lifts the new-mown
    hay,
And sweet the fretful swarms of grumbling bees
  That round and round the linden blossoms
    play;
And sweet the heifer breathing in the stall,
And the green bursting figs that hang upon the
    red-brick wall.

And sweet to hear the cuckoo mock the spring
  While the last violet loiters by the well,
And sweet to hear the shepherd Daphnis sing
  The song of Linus through a sunny dell
Of warm Arcadia where the corn is gold
And the slight lithe-limbed reapers dance about
    the wattled fold.

And sweet with young Lycoris to recline
  In some Illyrian valley far away,
Where canopied on herbs amaracine
  We too might waste the summer-trancèd day
Matching our reeds in sportive rivalry,
While far beneath us frets the troubled purple
    of the sea.

But sweeter far if silver-sandalled foot
Of some long-hidden God should ever tread
The Nuneham meadows, if with reeded flute
Pressed to his lips some Faun might raise his head
By the green water-flags, ah! sweet indeed
To see the heavenly herdsman call his white-fleeced flock to feed.

Then sing to me thou tuneful chorister,
Though what thou sing'st be thine own requiem!
Tell me thy tale thou hapless chronicler
Of thine own tragedies! do not contemn
These unfamiliar haunts, this English field,
For many a lovely coronal our northern isle can yield,

Which Grecian meadows know not, many a rose,
Which all day long in vales Æolian
A lad might seek in vain for, overgrows
Our hedges like a wanton courtesan
Unthrifty of her beauty, lilies too
Ilissus never mirrored star our streams, and cockles blue

Dot the green wheat which, though they are the signs
For swallows going south, would never spread
Their azure tents between the Attic vines;
Even that little weed of ragged red,
Which bids the robin pipe, in Arcady
Would be a trespasser, and many an unsung elegy

Sleeps in the reeds that fringe our winding Thames
Which to awake were sweeter ravishment
Than ever Syrinx wept for, diadems
Of brown bee-studded orchids which were meant
For Cytheræa's brows are hidden here
Unknown to Cytheræa, and by yonder pasturing steer

There is a tiny yellow daffodil,
The butterfly can see it from afar,
Although one summer evening's dew could fill
Its little cup twice over ere the star
Had called the lazy shepherd to his fold
And be no prodigal, each leaf is flecked with spotted gold

As if Jove's gorgeous leman Danaé
Hot from his gilded arms had stooped to kiss
The trembling petals, or young Mercury
Low-flying to the dusky ford of Dis
Had with one feather of his pinions
Just brushed them!—the slight stem which bears the burdens of its suns

Is hardly thicker than the gossamer,
Or poor Arachne's silver tapestry,—
Men say it bloomed upon the sepulchre
Of One I sometime worshipped, but to me
It seems to bring diviner memories
Of faun-loved Heliconian glades and blue nymph-haunted seas,

Of an untrodden vale at Tempé where
On the clear river's marge Narcissus lies,
The tangle of the forest in his hair,
The silence of the woodland in his eyes,
Wooing that drifting imagery which is
No sooner kissed than broken, memories of Salmacis.

Who is not boy or girl and yet is both,
  Fed by two fires and unsatisfied
Through their excess, each passion being loath
  For love's own sake to leave the other's side,
Yet killing love by staying, memories
Of Oreads peeping through the leaves of silent
    moonlit trees.

Of lonely Ariadne on the wharf
  At Naxos, when she saw the treacherous crew
Far out at sea, and waved her crimson scarf
  And called false Theseus back again nor knew
That Dionysos on an amber pard
Was close behind her: memories of what Mae-
    onia's bard

With sightless eyes beheld, the wall of Troy,
  Queen Helen lying in the carven room,
And at her side an amorous red-lipped boy
  Trimming with dainty hand his helmet's
    plume,
And far away the moil, the shout, the groan,
As Hector shielded off the spear and Ajax
    hurled the stone;

Of wingèd Perseus with his flawless sword
Cleaving the snaky tresses of the witch,
And all those tales imperishably stored
In little Grecian urns, freightage more rich
Than any gaudy galleon of Spain
Bare from the Indies ever! these at least bring
back again,

For well I know they are not dead at all,
The ancient Gods of Grecian poesy,
They are asleep, and when they hear thee call
Will wake and think 'tis very Thessaly,
This Thames the Daulian waters, this cool glade
The yellow-irised mead where once young Itys
laughed and played.

If it was thou dear jasmine-cradled bird
Who from the leafy stillness of thy throne
Sang to the wondrous boy, until he heard
The horn of Atalanta faintly blown
Across the Cumnor hills, and wandering
Through Bagley wood at evening found the
Attic poet's spring,—

Ah! tiny sober-suited advocate
That pleadest for the moon against the day!
If thou didst make the shepherd seek his mate
On that sweet questing, when Proserpina
Forgot it was not Sicily and leant
Across the mossy Sandford stile in ravished wonderment,—

Light-winged and bright-eyed miracle of the wood!
If ever thou didst soothe with melody
One of that little clan, that brotherhood
Which loved the morning-star of Tuscany
More than the perfect sun of Raphael,
And is immortal, sing to me! for I too love thee well,

Sing on! sing on! let the dull world grow young,
Let elemental things take form again,
And the old shapes of Beauty walk among
The simple garths and open crofts, as when
The son of Leto bare the willow rod,
And the soft sheep and shaggy goats followed the boyish God.

Sing on! sing on! and Bacchus will be here
  Astride upon his gorgeous Indian throne,
And over whimpering tigers shake the spear
  With yellow ivy crowned and gummy cone,
While at his side the wanton Bassarid
Will throw the lion by the mane and catch the
    mountain kid!

Sing on! and I will wear the leopard skin,
  And steal the moonèd wings of Ashtaroth,
Upon whose icy chariot we could win
  Cithæron in an hour e'er the froth
Has overbrimmed the wine-vat or the Faun
Ceased from the treading! ay, before the flicker-
    ing lamp of dawn

Has scared the hooting owlet to its nest,
  And warned the bat to close its filmy vans,
Some Mænad girl with vine-leaves on her breast
  Will filch their beechnuts from the sleeping
    Pans
So softly that the little nested thrush
Will never wake, and then with shrilly laugh
    and leap will rush

Down the green valley where the fallen dew
Lies thick beneath the elm and count her store,
Till the brown Satyrs in a jolly crew
Trample the loosestrife down along the shore,
And where their hornèd master sits in state
Bring strawberries and bloomy plums upon a wicker crate!

Sing on! and soon with passion-wearied face
Through the cool leaves Apollo's lad will come,
The Tyrian prince his bristled boar will chase
Adown the chestnut copses all a-bloom,
And ivory-limbed, gray-eyed, with look of pride,
After yon velvet-coated deer the virgin maid will ride.

Sing on! and I the dying boy will see
Stain with his purple blood the waxen bell
That overweighs the jacinth, and to me
The wretched Cyprian her woe will tell,
And I will kiss her mouth and streaming eyes,
And lead her to the myrtle-hidden grove where Adon lies!

Cry out aloud on Itys! memory
That foster-brother of remorse and pain
Drops poison in mine ear—O to be free,
To burn one's old ships! and to launch again
Into the white-plumed battle of the waves
And fight old Proteus for the spoil of coral-flowered caves!

O for Medea with her poppied spell!
O for the secret of the Colchian shrine!
O for one leaf of that pale asphodel
Which binds the tired brows of Proserpine,
And sheds such wondrous dews at eve that she
Dreams of the fields of Enna, by the far Sicilian sea,

Where oft the golden-girdled bee she chased
From lily to lily on the level mead,
Ere yet her sombre Lord had bid her taste
The deadly fruit of that pomegranate seed,
Ere the black steeds had harried her away
Down to the faint and flowerless land, the sick and sunless day.

O for one midnight and as paramour
The Venus of the little Melian farm!
O that some antique statue for one hour
Might wake to passion, and that I could charm
The Dawn at Florence from its dumb despair,
Mix with those mighty limbs and make that giant breast my lair!

Sing on! sing on! I would be drunk with life,
Drunk with the trampled vintage of my youth,
I would forget the wearying wasted strife,
The riven vale, the Gorgon eyes of Truth,
The prayerless vigil and the cry for prayer,
The barren gifts, the lifted arms, the dull insensate air!

Sing on! sing on! O feathered Niobe,
Thou canst make sorrow beautiful, and steal
From joy its sweetest music, not as we
Who by dead voiceless silence strive to heal
Our too untented wounds, and do but keep
Pain barricaded in our hearts, and murder pillowed sleep.

Sing louder yet, why must I still behold
The wan white face of that deserted Christ,
Whose bleeding hands my hands did once infold,
Whose smitten lips my lips so oft have kissed,
And now in mute and marble misery
Sits in His lone dishonored House and weeps,
perchance for me.

O memory cast down thy wreathèd shell!
Break thy hoarse lute O sad Melpomené!
O sorrow, sorrow keep thy cloistered cell
Nor dim with tears this limpid Castaly!
Cease, cease, sad bird, thou dost the forest wrong
To vex its sylvan quiet with such wild impassioned song!

Cease, cease, or if 'tis anguish to be dumb
Take from the pastoral thrush her simpler air,
Whose jocund carelessness [illegible] more become
This English woodland than thy keen despair,
Ah! cease and let the north wind bear thy lay
Back to the rocky hills of Thrace, the stormy Daulian bay.

A moment more, the startled leaves had stirred,
Endymion would have passed across the mead
Moonstruck with love, and this still Thames had heard
Pan plash and paddle groping for some reed
To lure from her blue cave that Naiad maid
Who for such piping listens half in joy and half afraid.

A moment more, the waking dove had cooed,
The silver daughter of the silver sea
With the fond gyves of clinging hands had wooed
Her wanton from the chase, the Dryope
Had thrust aside the branches of her oak
To see the lusty gold-haired lad rein in his snorting yoke.

A moment more, the trees had stooped to kiss
Pale Daphne just awakening from the swoon
Of tremulous laurels, lonely Salmacis
Had bared his barren beauty to the moon,
And through the vale with sad voluptuous smile
Antinöus had wandered, the red lotus of the Nile.

Down leaning from his black and clustering hair
To shade those slumberous eyelids' caverned bliss,
Or else on yonder grassy slope with bare
High-tuniced limbs unravished Artemis
Had bade her hounds give tongue, and roused the deer
From his green ambuscade with shrill hallo and pricking spear.

Lie still, lie still, O passionate heart, lie still!
O Melancholy, fold thy raven wing!
O sobbing Dryad, from thy hollow hill
Come not with such desponded answering!
No more thou wingèd Marsyas complain,
Apollo loveth not to hear such troubled songs of pain!

It was a dream, the glade is tenantless,
No soft Ionian laughter moves the air,
The Thames creeps on in sluggish leadenness,
And from the copse left desolate and bare
Fled is young Bacchus with his revelry,
Yet still from Nuneham wood there comes that thrilling melody

So sad, that one might think a human heart
Brake in each separate note, a quality
Which music sometimes has, being the Art
Which is most nigh to tears and memory,
Poor mourning Philomel, what dost thou fear?
Thy sister doth not haunt these fields, Pandion
is not here,

Here is no cruel Lord with murderous blade,
No woven web of bloody heraldries,
But mossy dells for roving comrades made,
Warm valleys where the tired student lies
With half-shut book, and many a winding walk
Where rustic lovers stray at eve in happy simple
talk.

The harmless rabbit gambols with its young
Across the trampled towing-path, where late
A troop of laughing boys in jostling throng
Cheered with their noisy cries the racing
eight;
The gossamer, with ravelled silver threads,
Works at its little loom, and from the dusky
red-eaved sheds

Of the lone Farm a flickering light shines out
Where the swinked shepherd drives his bleating flock
Back to their wattled sheep-cotes, a faint shout
Comes from some Oxford boat at Sandford lock,
And starts the moor-hen from the sedgy rill,
And the dim lengthening shadows flit like swallows up the hill.

The heron passes homeward to the mere,
The blue mist creeps among the shivering trees,
Gold world by world the silent stars appear,
And like a blossom blown before the breeze,
A white moon drifts across the shimmering sky,
Mute arbitress of all thy sad, thy rapturous threnody.

She does not heed thee, wherefore should she heed,
She knows Endymion is not far away,
'Tis I, 'tis I, whose soul is as the reed
Which has no message of its own to play,

So pipes another's bidding, it is I,
Drifting with every wind on the wide sea of misery.

Ah! the brown bird has ceased: one exquisite trill
About the sombre woodland seems to cling,
Dying in music, else the air is still,
So still that one might hear the bat's small wing
Wander and wheel above the pines, or tell
Each tiny dewdrop dripping from the blue-bell's brimming cell.

And far across the lengthening wold,
Across the willowy flats and thickets brown,
Magdalen's tall tower tipped with tremulous gold
Marks the long High Street of the little town,
And warns me to return; I must not wait,
Hark! 'tis the curfew booming from the bell of Christ Church Gate.

Wind Flowers

IMPRESSION DU MATIN.

The Thames nocturne of blue and gold
  Changed to a Harmony in gray:
  A barge with ochre-colored hay
Dropt from the wharf: and chill and cold

The yellow fog came creeping down
  The bridges, till the houses' walls
  Seemed changed to shadows, and St. Paul's
Loomed like a bubble o'er the town.

Then suddenly arose the clang
  Of waking life; the streets were stirred
  With country waggons: and a bird
Flew to the glistening roofs and sang.

But one pale woman all alone,
  The daylight kissing her wan hair,
  Loitered beneath the gas lamp's flare,
With lips of flame and heart of stone.

MAGDALEN WALKS.

The little white clouds are racing over the sky,
And the fields are strewn with the gold of the flower of March,
The daffodil breaks underfoot, and the tasselled larch
Sways and swings as the thrush goes hurrying by.

A delicate odor is borne on the wings of the morning breeze,
The odor of leaves, and of grass, and of newly upturned earth,
The birds are singing for joy of the Spring's glad birth,
Hopping from branch to branch on the rocking trees,

And all the woods are alive with the murmur
and sound of Spring,
And the rosebud breaks into pink on the
climbing brier,
And the crocus-bed is a quivering moon of fire
Girdled round with the belt of an amethyst ring.

And the plane to the pine-tree is whispering
some tale of love
Till it rustles with laughter and tosses its
mantle of green
And the gloom of the wych-elm's hollow is lit
with the iris sheen
Of the burnished rainbow throat and the silver
breast of a dove.

See! the lark starts up from his bed in the
meadow there,
Breaking the gossamer threads and the nets
of dew,
And flashing a-down the river, a flame of
blue!
The kingfisher flies like an arrow, and wounds
the air.

ATHANASIA.

To that gaunt House of Art which lacks for naught
Of all the great things men have saved from Time,
The withered body of a girl was brought
Dead ere the world's glad youth had touched its prime,
And seen by lonely Arabs lying hid
In the dim womb of some black pyramid.

But when they had unloosed the linen band
Which swathed the Egyptian's body,—lo! was found
Closed in the wasted hollow of her hand
A little seed, which sown in English ground
Did wondrous snow of starry blossoms bear,
And spread rich odors through our springtide air.

With such strange arts this flower did allure
That all forgotten was the asphodel,
And the brown bee, the lily's paramour,
Forsook the cup where he was wont to dwell,
For not a thing of earth it seemed to be,
But stolen from some heavenly Arcady.

In vain the sad narcissus, wan and white
At its own beauty, hung across the stream,
The purple dragon-fly had no delight
With its gold-dust to make his wings a-gleam,
Ah! no delight the jasmine-bloom to kiss,
Or brush the rain-pearls from the eucharis.

For love of it the passionate nightingale
Forgot the hills of Thrace, the cruel king,
And the pale dove no longer cared to sail
Through the wet woods at time of blossoming,
But round this flower of Egypt sought to float,
With silvered wing and amethystine throat.

While the hot sun blazed in his tower of blue
A cooling wind crept from the land of snows,
And the warm south with tender tears of dew

Drenched its white leaves when Hesperos
uprose
Amid those sea-green meadows of the sky
On which the scarlet bars of sunset lie.

But when o'er wastes of lily-haunted field
The tired birds had stayed their amorous tune,
And broad and glittering like an argent shield
High in the sapphire heavens hung the moon,
Did no strange dream or evil memory make
Each tremulous petal of its blossoms shake?

Ah no! to this bright flower a thousand years
Seemed but the lingering of a summer's day,
It never knew the tide of cankering fears
Which turn a boy's gold hair to withered gray,
The dread desire of death it never knew,
Or how all folk that they were born must rue.

For we to death with pipe and dancing go,
Nor would we pass the ivory gate again,
As some sad river wearied of its flow
Through the dull plains, the haunts of com-
mon men,
Leaps lover-like into the terrible sea!
And counts it gain to die so gloriously.

We mar our lordly strength in barren strife
With the world's legions led by clamorous care,
It never feels decay but gathers life
From the pure sunlight and the supreme air,
We live beneath Time's wasting sovereignty,
It is the child of all eternity.

SERENADE.

(FOR MUSIC.)

The western wind is blowing fair
  Across the dark Ægean sea,
And at the secret marble stair
  My Tyrian galley waits for thee.
Come down! the purple sail is spread,
  The watchman sleeps within the town.
O leave thy lily-flowered bed,
  O Lady mine come down, come down!

She will not come, I know her well,
  Of lover's vows she hath no care,
And little good a man can tell
  Of one so cruel and so fair.
True love is but a woman's toy,
  They never know the lover's pain,
And I who loved as loves a boy
  Must love in vain, must love in vain.

O noble pilot, tell me true
Is that the sheen of golden hair?
Or is it but the tangled dew
That binds the passion-flowers there?
Good sailor come and tell me now
Is that my lady's lily hand?
Or is it but the gleaming prow,
Or is it but the silver sand?

No! no! 'tis not the tangled dew,
'Tis not the silver-fretted sand,
It is my own dear Lady true
With golden hair and lily hand!
O noble pilot, steer for Troy,
Good sailor, ply the laboring oar,
This is the Queen of life and joy
Whom we must bear from Grecian shore!

The waning sky grows faint and blue,
It wants an hour still of day,
Aboard! aboard! my gallant crew,
O Lady mine away! away!
O noble pilot, steer for Troy,
Good sailor, ply the laboring oar,
O loved as only loves a boy!
O loved for ever evermore!

ENDYMION.

(FOR MUSIC.)

The apple trees are hung with gold,
  And birds are loud in Arcady,
The sheep lie bleating in the fold,
The wild goat runs across the wold,
But yesterday his love he told,
  I know he will come back to me.
O rising moon! O Lady moon!
  Be you my lover's sentinel,
  You cannot choose but know him well,
For he is shod with purple shoon,
You cannot choose but know my love,
  For he a shepherd's crook doth bear,
And he is soft as any dove,
  And brown and curly is his hair.

The turtle now has ceased to call
  Upon her crimson-footed groom,
The gray wolf prowls about the stall,

The lily's singing seneschal
Sleeps in the lily-bell, and all
  The violet hills are lost in gloom.
O risen moon! O holy moon!
  Stand on the top of Helice,
  And if my own true love you see,
Ah! if you see the purple shoon,
The hazel crook, the lad's brown hair,
  The goat-skin wrapped about his arm,
Tell him that I am waiting where
  The rushlight glimmers in the Farm.

The falling dew is cold and chill,
  And no bird sings in Arcady,
The little fauns have left the hill,
Even the tired daffodil
Has closed its gilded doors, and still
  My lover comes not back to me.
False moon! False moon! O waning moon!
  Where is my own true lover gone,
  Where are the lips vermilion,
The shepherd's crook, the purple shoon?
Why spread that silver pavilion,
  Why wear that veil of drifting mist?
Ah! thou hast young Endymion,
  Thou hast the lips that should be kissed!

LA BELLA DONNA DELLA MIA MENTE.

My limbs are wasted with a flame,
  My feet are sore with travelling,
For calling on my Lady's name
  My lips have now forgot to sing.

O Linnet in the wild-rose brake
  Strain for my Love thy melody,
O Lark sing louder for love's sake
  My gentle Lady passeth by.

She is too fair for any man
  To see or hold his heart's delight,
Fairer than Queen or courtezan
  Or moon-lit water in the night.

Her hair is bound with myrtle leaves,
  (Green leaves upon her golden hair!)
Green grasses through the yellow sheaves
  Of autumn corn are not more fair.

Her little lips, more made to kiss
Than to cry bitterly for pain,
Are tremulous as brook-water is,
Or roses after evening rain.

Her neck is like white melilote
Flushing for pleasure of the sun,
The throbbing of the linnet's throat
Is not so sweet to look upon.

As a pomegranate, cut in twain,
White-seeded, is her crimson mouth,
Her cheeks are as the fading stain
Where the peach reddens to the south.

O twining hands! O delicate
White body made for love and pain!
O House of Love! O desolate
Pale flower beaten by the rain!

CHANSON.

A ring of gold and a milk-white dove
  Are goodly gifts for thee,
And a hempen rope for your own love
  To hang upon a tree.

For you a House of Ivory
  (Roses are white in the rose-bower)!
A narrow bed for me to lie
  (White, O white is the hemlock flower)!

Myrtle and jessamine for you
  (O the red rose is fair to see)!
For me the cypress and the rue
  (Fairest of all is rose-mary)!

For you three lovers of your hand
  (Green grass where a man lies dead)!
For me three paces on the sand
  (Plant lilies at my head)!

Charmides

CHARMIDES

I.

He was a Grecian lad, who coming home
  With pulpy figs and wine from Sicily
Stood at his galley's prow, and let the foam
  Blow through his crisp brown curls unconsciously,
And holding wind and wave in boy's despite
Peered from his dripping seat across the wet and stormy night

Till with the dawn he saw a burnished spear
  Like a thin thread of gold against the sky,
And hoisted sail, and strained the creeking gear,
  And bade the pilot head her lustily
Against the nor'-west gale, and all day long
Held on his way, and marked the rowers' time with measured song,

And when the faint Corinthian hills were red
Dropped anchor in a little sandy bay,
And with fresh boughs of olive crowned his head,
And brushed from cheek and throat the hoary spray,
And washed his limbs with oil, and from the hold
Brought out his linen tunic and his sandals brazen-soled.

And a rich robe stained with the fishes' juice
Which of some swarthy trader he had bought
Upon the sunny quay at Syracuse,
And was with Tyrian broideries inwrought,
And by the questioning merchants made his way
Up through the soft and silver woods, and when the laboring day

Had spun its tangled web of crimson cloud,
Clomb the high hill, and with swift silent feet
Crept to the fane unnoticed by the crowd
Of busy priests, and from some dark retreat

Watched the young swains his frolic playmates
bring
The firstling of their little flock, and the shy
shepherd fling

The crackling salt upon the flame, or hang
His studded crook against the temple wall
To Her who keeps away the ravenous fang
Of the base wolf from homestead and from
stall;
And then the clear-voiced maidens 'gan to sing,
And to the altar each man brought some goodly
offering,

A beechen cup brimming with milky foam,
A fair cloth wrought with cunning imagery
Of hounds in chase, a waxen honey-comb
Dripping with oozy gold which scarce the bee
Had ceased from building, a black skin of oil
Meet for the wrestlers, a great boar the fierce
and white-tusked spoil

Stolen from Artemis that jealous maid
To please Athena, and the dappled hide
Of a tall stag who in some mountain glade
Had met the shaft; and then the herald cried,

And from the pillared precinct one by one
Went the glad Greeks well pleased that they
their simple vows had done.

And the old priest put out the waning fires
Save that one lamp whose restless ruby glowed
For ever in the cell, and the shrill lyres
Came fainter on the wind, as down the road
In joyous dance these country folk did pass,
And with stout hands the warder closed the
gates of polished brass.

Long time he lay and hardly dared to breathe,
And heard the cadenced drip of spilt-out wine,
And the rose-petals falling from the wreath
As the night breezes wandered through the
shrine,
And seemed to be in some entrancèd swoon
Till through the open roof above the full and
brimming moon

Flooded with sheeny waves the marble floor,
When from his nook upleapt the venturous
lad,

And flinging wide the cedar-carven door
Beheld an awful image saffron-clad
And armed for battle! the gaunt Griffin glared
From the huge helm, and the long lance of wreck and ruin flared

Like a red rod of flame, stony and steeled
The Gorgon's head its leaden eyeballs rolled,
And writhed its snaky horrors through the shield,
And gaped aghast with bloodless lips and cold
In passion impotent, while with blind gaze
The blinking owl between the feet hooted in shrill amaze.

The lonely fisher as he trimmed his lamp
Far out at sea off Sunium, or cast
The net for tunnies, heard a brazen tramp
Of horses smite the waves, and a wild blast
Divide the folded curtains of the night,
And knelt upon the little poop, and prayed in holy fright.

And guilty lovers in their venery
Forgat a little while their stolen sweets,
Deeming they heard dread Dian's bitter cry;
And the grim watchmen on their lofty seats
Ran to their shields in haste precipitate,
Or strained black-bearded throats across the dusky parapet.

For round the temple rolled the clang of arms,
And the twelve Gods leapt up in marble fear,
And the air quaked with dissonant alarms
Till huge Poseidon shook his mighty spear,
And on the frieze the prancing horses neighed,
And the low tread of hurrying feet rang from the cavalcade.

Ready for death with parted lips he stood,
And well content at such a price to see
That calm wide brow, that terrible maidenhood.
The marvel of that pitiless chastity,
Ah! well content indeed, for never wight
Since Troy's young shepherd prince had seen so wonderful a sight.

Ready for death he stood, but lo! the air
Grew silent, and the horses ceased to neigh,
And off his brow he tossed the clustering hair,
And from his limbs he threw the cloak away,
For whom would not such love make desperate,
And nigher came, and touched her throat, and
with hands violate

Undid the cuirass, and the crocus gown,
And bared the breasts of polished ivory,
Till from the waist the peplos falling down
Left visible the secret mystery
Which to no lover will Athena show,
The grand cool flanks, the crescent thighs, the
bossy hills of snow.

Those who have never known a lover's sin
Let them not read my ditty, it will be
To their dull ears so musicless and thin
That they will have no joy of it, but ye
To whose wan cheeks now creeps the lingering
smile,
Ye who have learned who Eros is,—O listen yet
a-while.

A little space he let his greedy eyes
Rest on the burnished image, till mere sight
Half swooned for surfeit of such luxuries,
And then his lips in hungering delight
Fed on her lips, and round the towered neck
He flung his arms, nor cared at all his passion's will to check.

Never I ween did lover hold such tryst,
For all night long he murmured honeyed word,
And saw her sweet unravished limbs, and kissed
Her pale and argent body undisturbed,
And paddled with the polished throat, and pressed
His hot and beating heart upon her chill and icy breast.

It was as if Numidian javelins
Pierced through and through his wild and whirling brain,
And his nerves thrilled like throbbing violins
In exquisite pulsation, and the pain
Was such sweet anguish that he never drew
His lips from hers till overhead the lark of warning flew.

They who have never seen the daylight peer
Into a darkened room, and drawn the curtain,
And with dull eyes and wearied from some dear
And worshipped body risen, they for certain
Will never know of what I try to sing,
How long the last kiss was, how fond and late
his lingering.

The moon was girdled with a crystal rim,
The sign which shipmen say is ominous
Of wrath in heaven, the wan stars were dim,
And the low lightening east was tremulous
With the faint fluttering wings of flying dawn,
Ere from the silent sombre shrine this lover had
withdrawn.

Down the steep rock with hurried feet and fast
Clomb the brave lad, and reached the cave of
Pan,
And heard the goat-foot snoring as he passed,
And leapt upon a grassy knoll and ran
Like a young fawn unto an olive wood
Which in a shady valley by the well-built city
stood.

And sought a little stream, which well he knew,
For oftentimes with boyish careless shout
The green and crested grebe he would pursue,
Or snare in woven net the silver trout,
And down amid the startled reeds he lay
Panting in breathless sweet affright, and waited
for the day.

On the green bank he lay, and let one hand
Dip in the cool dark eddies listlessly,
And soon the breath of morning came and
fanned
His hot flushed cheeks, or lifted wantonly
The tangled curls from off his forehead, while
He on the running water gazed with strange and
secret smile.

And soon the shepherd in rough woollen cloak
With his long crook undid the wattled cotes,
And from the stack a thin blue wreath of smoke
Curled through the air across the ripening
oats,
And on the hill the yellow house-dog bayed
As through the crisp and rustling fern the heavy
cattle strayed.

And when the light-foot mower went a-field
Across the meadows laced with threaded dew,
And the sheep bleated on the misty weald,
And from its nest the waking corn-crake flew,
Some woodmen saw him lying by the stream
And marvelled much that any lad so beautiful
could seem,

Nor deemed him born of mortals, and one said,
"It is young Hylas, that false runaway
Who with a Naïad now would make his bed
Forgetting Herakles," but others, "Nay,
It is Narcissus, his own paramour,
Those are the fond and crimson lips no woman
can allure."

And when they nearer came a third one cried,
"It is young Dionysos who has hid
His spear and fawnskin by the river side
Weary of hunting with the Bassarid,
And wise indeed were we away to fly,
They live not long who on the gods immortal
come to spy."

So turned they back, and feared to look behind,
And told the timid swain how they had seen
Amid the reeds some woodland God reclined,
And no man dared to cross the open green,
And on that day no olive-tree was slain,
Nor rushes cut, but all deserted was the fair domain.

Save when the neat-herd's lad, his empty pail
Well slung upon his back, with leap and bound
Raced on the other side, and stopped to hail
Hoping that he some comrade new had found,
And gat no answer, and then half afraid
Passed on his simple way, or down the still and silent glade.

A little girl ran laughing from the farm
Not thinking of love's secret mysteries,
And when she saw the white and gleaming arm
And all his manlihood, with longing eyes
Whose passion mocked her sweet virginity
Watched him a-while, and then stole back sadly and wearily

Far off he heard the city's hum and noise,
And now and then the shriller laughter where
The passionate purity of brown-limbed boys
Wrestled or raced in the clear healthful air,
And now and then a little tinkling bell
As the shorn wether led the sheep down to the mossy well.

Through the gray willows danced the fretful gnat,
The grasshopper chirped idly from the tree,
In sleek and oily coat the water-rat
Breasting the little ripples manfully
Made for the wild-duck's nest, from bough to bough
Hopped the shy finch, and the huge tortoise crept across the slough.

On the faint wind floated the silky seeds,
As the bright scythe swept through the waving grass,
The ousel-cock splashed circles in the reeds
And flecked with silver whorls the forest's glass,

Which scarce had caught again its imagery
Ere from its bed the dusky tench leapt at the
dragon-fly.

But little care had he for anything
Though up and down the beech the squirrel
played,
And from the copse the linnet 'gan to sing
To her brown mate her sweetest serenade,
Ah! little care indeed, for he had seen
The breasts of Pallas and the naked wonder of
the Queen.

But when the herdsman called his straggling
goats
With whistling pipe across the rocky road,
And the shard-beetle with its trumpet-notes
Boomed through the darkening woods, and
seemed to bode
Of coming storm, and the belated crane
Passed homeward like a shadow, and the dull
big drops of rain

Fell on the pattering fig-leaves, up he rose,
And from the gloomy forest went his way
Past sombre homestead and wet orchard-close,
And came at last unto a little quay,
And called his mates a-board, and took his seat
On the high poop, and pushed from land, and
loosed the dripping sheet,

And steered across the bay, and when nine suns
Passed down the long and laddered way of
gold,
And nine pale moons had breathed their orisons
To the chaste stars their confessors, or told
Their dearest secret to the downy moth
That will not fly at noonday, through the foam
and surging froth

Came a great owl with yellow sulphurous eyes
And lit upon the ship, whose timbers creaked
As though the lading of three argosies
Were in the hold, and flopped its wings, and
shrieked,
And darkness straightway stole across the deep,
Sheathed was Orion's sword, dread Mars himself
fled down the steep,

And the moon hid behind a tawny mask
Of drifting cloud, and from the ocean's marge
Rose the red plume, the huge and hornèd casque,
The seven cubit spear, the brazen targe!
And clad in bright and burnished panoply
Athena strode across the stretch of sick and shivering sea!

To the dull sailors' sight her loosened locks
Seemed like the jagged storm-rack, and her feet
Only the spume that floats on hidden rocks,
And marking how the rising waters beat
Against the rolling ship, the pilot cried
To the young helmsman at the stern to luff to windward side.

But he, the over-bold adulterer,
A dear profaner of great mysteries,
An ardent amorous idolater,
When he beheld those grand relentless eyes
Laughed loud for joy, and crying out "I come"
Leapt from the lofty poop into the chill and churning foam.

Then fell from the high heaven one bright star,
One dancer left the circling galaxy,
And back to Athens on her clattering car
In all the pride of venged divinity
Pale Pallas swept with shrill and steely clank,
And a few gurgling bubbles rose where her boy
lover sank.

And the mast shuddered as the gaunt owl flew,
With mocking hoots after the wrathful Queen,
And the old pilot bade the trembling crew
Hoist the big sail, and told how he had seen
Close to the stern a dim and giant form,
And like a dripping swallow the stout ship
dashed through the storm.

And no man dared to speak of Charmides
Deeming that he some evil thing had wrought,
And when they reached the strait Symplegades
They beached their galley on the shore, and
sought
The toll-gate of the city hastily,
And in the market showed their brown and
pictured pottery.

II.

But some good Triton-god had ruth, and bare
The boy's drowned body back to Grecian land,
And mermaids combed his dank and dripping hair
And smoothed his brow, and loosed his clinching hand,
Some brought sweet spices from far Araby,
And others bade the halcyon sing her softest lullaby.

And when he neared his old Athenian home,
A mighty billow rose up suddenly
Upon whose oily back the clotted foam
Lay diapered in some strange fantasy,
And clasping him unto its glassy breast,
Swept landward, like a white-maned steed upon a venturous quest!

Now where Colonos leans unto the sea
There lies a long and level stretch of lawn,
The rabbit knows it, and the mountain bee
For it deserts Hymettus, and the Faun
Is not afraid, for never through the day
Comes a cry ruder than the shout of shepherd lads at play.

But often from the thorny labyrinth
And tangled branches of the circling wood
The stealthy hunter sees young Hyacinth
Hurling the polished disk, and draws his hood
Over his guilty gaze, and creeps away,
Nor dares to wind his horn, or—else at the first
break of day

The Dryads come and throw the leathern ball
Along the reedy shore, and circumvent
Some goat-eared Pan to be their seneschal
For fear of bold Poseidon's ravishment,
And loose their girdles, with shy timorous eyes,
Lest from the surf his azure arms and purple
beard should rise.

On this side and on that a rocky cave,
Hung with yellow-bell'd laburnum, stands,
Smooth is the beach, save where some ebbing
wave
Leaves its faint outline etched upon the sands,
As though it feared to be too soon forgot
By the green rush, its playfellow,—and yet, it is
a spot

So small, that the inconstant butterfly
Could steal the hoarded honey from each flower
Ere it was noon, and still not satisfy
Its over-greedy love,—within an hour
A sailor boy, were he but rude enow
To land and pluck a garland for his galley's painted prow,

Would almost leave the little meadow bare,
For it knows nothing of great pageantry,
Only a few narcissi here and there
Stand separate in sweet austerity,
Dotting the unmown grass with silver stars,
And here and there a daffodil waves tiny scimetars.

Hither the billow brought him, and was glad
Of such dear servitude, and where the land
Was virgin of all waters laid the lad
Upon the golden margent of the strand,
And like a lingering lover oft returned
To kiss those pallid limbs which once with intense fire burned,

Ere the wet seas had quenched that holocaust,
That self-fed flame, that passionate lustihead,
Ere grisly death with chill and nipping frost
Had withered up those lilies white and red
Which, while the boy would through the forest range,
Answered each other in a sweet antiphonal counter-change.

And when at dawn the wood-nymphs, hand-in-hand,
Threaded the bosky dell, their satyr spied
The boy's pale body stretched upon the sand,
And feared Poseidon's treachery, and cried,
And like bright sunbeams flitting through a glade,
Each startled Dryad sought some safe and leafy ambuscade.

Save one white girl, who deemed it would not be
So dread a thing to feel a sea-god's arms
Crushing her breasts in amorous tyranny,
And longed to listen to those subtle charms
Insidious lovers weave when they would win
Some fenced fortress, and stole back again, nor thought it sin

To yield her treasure unto one so fair,
And lay beside him, thirsty with love's drouth,
Called him soft names, played with his tangled hair,
And with hot lips made havoc of his mouth
Afraid he might not wake, and then afraid
Lest he might wake too soon, fled back, and then, fond renegade,

Returned to fresh assault, and all day long
Sat at his side, and laughed at her new toy,
And held his hand, and sang her sweetest song,
Then frowned to see how froward was the boy
Who would not with her maidenhood entwine,
Nor knew that three days since his eyes had looked on Proserpine,

Nor knew what sacrilege his lips had done,
But said, "He will awake, I know him well,
He will awake at evening when the sun
Hangs his red shield on Corinth's citadel,
This sleep is but a cruel treachery
To make me love him more, and in some cavern of the sea

"Deeper than ever falls the fishers' line
Already a huge Triton blows his horn,
And weaves a garland from the crystalline
And drifting ocean-tendrils to adorn
The emerald pillars of our bridal bed,
For sphered in foaming silver, and with coral-
crownèd head,

"We two will sit upon a throne of pearl,
And a blue wave will be our canopy,
And at our feet the water-snakes will curl
In all their amethystine panoply
Of diamonded mail, and we will mark
The mullets swimming by the mast of some
storm-foundered bark,

"Vermilion-finned with eyes of bossy gold
Like flakes of crimson light, and the great
deep
His glassy-portaled chamber will unfold,
And we will see the painted dolphins sleep
Cradled by murmuring halcyons on the rocks
Where Proteus in quaint suit of green pastures
his monstrous flocks.

"And tremulous opal hued anemones
Will wave their purple fringes where we tread
Upon the mirrored floor, and argosies
Of fishes flecked with tawny scales will thread
The drifting cordage of the shattered wreck,
And honey-colored amber beads our twining limbs will deck."

But when that baffled Lord of War the Sun
With gaudy pennon flying passed away
Into his brazen House, and one by one
The little yellow stars began to stray
Across the field of heaven, ah! then indeed
She feared his lips upon her lips would never care to feed,

And cried, "Awake, already the pale moon
Washes the trees with silver, and the wave
Creeps gray and chilly up this sandy dune,
The croaking frogs are out, and from the cave
The night-jar shrieks, the fluttering bats repass,
And the brown stoat with hollow flanks creeps through the dusky grass.

"Nay, though thou art a God, be not so coy,
For in yon stream there is a little reed
That often whispers how a lovely boy
Lay with her once upon a grassy mead,
Who when his cruel pleasure he had done
Spread wings of rustling gold and soared aloft
into the sun.

"Be not so coy, the laurel trembles still
With great Apollo's kisses, and the fir·
Whose clustering sisters fringe the sea-ward hill
Hath many a tale of that bold ravisher
Whom men call Boreas, and I have seen
The mocking eyes of Hermes through the poplar's silvery sheen.

"Even the jealous Naiads call me fair,
And every morn a young and ruddy swain
Wooes me with apples and with locks of hair,
And seeks to soothe my virginal disdain
By all the gifts the gentle wood-nymphs love;
But yesterday he brought to me an iris-plumaged dove

"With little crimson feet, which with its store
Of seven spotted eggs the cruel lad
Had stolen from the lofty sycamore
At day-break when her amorous comrade had
Flown off in search of berried juniper
Which most they love; the fretful wasp, that
earliest vintager

"Of the blue grapes, hath not persistency
So constant as this simple shepherd-boy
For my poor lips, his joyous purity
And laughing sunny eyes might well decoy
A Dryad from her oath to Artemis;
For very beautiful is he, his mouth was made to
kiss.

"His argent forehead, like a rising moon
Over the dusky hills of meeting brows,
Is crescent shaped, the hot and Tyrian noon
Leads from the myrtle-grove no goodlier
spouse
For Cytheræa, the first silky down
Fringes his blushing cheeks, and his young limbs
are strong and brown:

"And he is rich, and fat and fleecy herds
Of bleating sheep upon his meadows lie,
And many an earthen bowl of yellow curds
Is in his homestead for the thievish fly
To swim and drown in, the pink clover mead
Keeps its sweet store for him, and he can pipe
on oaten reed.

"And yet I love him not, it was for thee
I kept my love, I knew that thou would'st
come
To rid me of this pallid chastity;
Thou fairest flower of the flowerless foam
Of all the wide Ægean, brightest star
Of ocean's azure heavens where the mirrored
planets are!

"I knew that thou would'st come, for when at
first
The dry wood burgeoned, and the sap of
Spring
Swelled in my green and tender bark or burst
To myriad multitudinous blossoming

Which mocked the midnight with its mimic moons
That did not dread the dawn, and first the thrushes' rapturous tunes

"Startled the squirrel from its granary,
And cuckoo flowers fringed the narrow lane,
Through my young leaves a sensuous ecstasy
Crept like new wine, and every mossy vein
Throbbed with the fitful pulse of amorous blood,
And the wild winds of passion shook my slim stem's maidenhood.

"The trooping fawns at evening came and laid
Their cool black noses on my lowest boughs
And on my topmost branch the blackbird made
A little nest of grasses for his spouse,
And now and then a twittering wren would light
On a thin twig which hardly bare the weight of such delight.

"I was the Attic shepherd's trysting place,
Beneath my shadow Amaryllis lay,
And round my trunk would laughing Daphnis chase
The timorous girl, till tired out with play

She felt his hot breath stir her tangled hair,
And turned, and looked, and fled no more from
such delightful snare.

"Then come away unto my ambuscade
Where clustering woodbine weaves a canopy
For amorous pleasaunce, and the rustling shade
Of Paphian myrtles seems to sanctify
The dearest rites of love, there in the cool
And green recesses of its furthest depth there
is a pool,

"The ouzel's haunt, the wild bee's pasturage;
For round its rim great creamy lilies float
Through their flat leaves in verdant anchorage,
Each cup a white-sailed golden-laden boat
Steered by a dragon-fly,—be not afraid
To leave this wan and wave-kissed shore, surely
the place were made

"For lovers such as we, the Cyprian Queen,
One arm around her boyish paramour,
Strays often there at eve, and I have seen
The moon strip off her misty vestiture
For young Endymion's eyes, be not afraid,
The panther feet of Dian never tread that secret
glade.

"Nay if thou wil'st, back to the beating brine,
Back to the boisterous billow let us go,
And walk all day beneath the hyaline
Huge vault of Neptune's watery portico,
And watch the purple monsters of the deep
Sport in ungainly play, and from his lair keen
Xiphias leap.

"For if my mistress find me lying here
She will not ruth or gentle pity show,
But lay her boar-spear down, and with austere
Relentless fingers string the cornel bow,
And draw the feathered notch against her
breast,
And loose the archèd cord, ay, even now upon
the quest

"I hear her hurrying feet,—awake, awake,
Thou laggard in love's battle! once at least
Let me drink deep of passion's wine, and slake
My parchèd being with the nectarous feast
Which even Gods affect! O come Love come,
Still we have time to reach the cavern of thine
azure home."

Scarce had she spoken when the shuddering trees
Shook, and the leaves divided, and the air
Grew conscious of a God, and the gray seas
Crawled backward, and a long and dismal blare
Blew from some tasseled horn, a sleuth-hound bayed
And like a flame a barbèd reed flew whizzing down the glade.

And where the little flowers of her breast
Just brake in to their milky blossoming,
This murderous paramour, this unbidden guest,
Pierced and struck deep in horrid chambering,
And plowed a bloody furrow with its dart,
And dug a long red road, and cleft with wingèd death her heart.

Sobbing her life out with a bitter cry
On the boy's body fell the Dryad maid,
Sobbing for incomplete virginity,
And raptures unenjoyed, and pleasures dead,

And all the pain of things unsatisfied,
And the bright drops of crimson youth crept
down her throbbing side.

Ah! pitiful it was to hear her moan,
And very pitiful to see her die
Ere she had yielded up her sweets, or known
The joy of passion, that dread mystery
Which not to know is not to live at all,
And yet to know is to be held in death's most
deadly thrall.

But as it hapt the Queen of Cytheré,
Who with Adonis all night long had lain
Within some shepherd's hut in Arcady,
On team of silver doves and gilded wane
Was journeying Paphos-ward, high up afar
From mortal ken between the mountains and
the morning star,

And when low down she spied the hapless pair,
And heard the Oread's faint despairing cry,
Whose cadence seemed to play upon the air
As though it were a viol, hastily
She bade her pigeons fold each straining plume,
And dropt to earth, and reached the strand, and
. . saw their dolorous doom.

For as a gardener turning back his head
To catch the last notes of the linnet, mows
With careless scythe too near some flower bed,
And cuts the thorny pillar of the rose,
And with the flower's loosened loveliness
Strews the brown mold, or as some shepherd lad
in wantonness

Driving his little flock along the mead
Treads down two daffodils which side by side
Have lured the lady-bird with yellow brede
And made the gaudy moth forget its pride,
Treads down their brimming golden chalices
Under light feet which were not made for such
rude ravages,

Or as a schoolboy tired of his book
Flings himself down upon the reedy grass
And plucks two water-lilies from the brook,
And for a time forgets the hour glass,
Then wearies of their sweets, and goes his way,
And lets the hot sun kill them, even so these
lovers lay.

And Venus cried, "It is dread Artemis
Whose bitter hand hath wrought this cruelty,
Or else that mightier mayde whose care it is
To guard her strong and stainless majesty
Upon the hill Athenian,—alas!
That they who loved so well unloved into Death's house should pass."

So with soft hands she laid the boy and girl
In the great golden waggon tenderly,
Her white throat whiter than a moony pearl
Just threaded with a blue vein's tapestry
Had not yet ceased to throb, and still her breast
Swayed like a wind-stirred lily in ambiguous unrest.

And then each pigeon spread its milky van,
The bright car soared into the dawning sky,
And like a cloud the aerial caravan
Passed over the Ægean silently,
Till the faint air was troubled with the song
From the wan mouths that call on bleeding Thammuz all night long.

But when the doves had reached their wonted goal
Where the wide stair of orbèd marble dips
Its snows into the sea, her fluttering soul
Just shook the trembling petals of her lips
And passed into the void, and Venus knew
That one fair maid the less would walk amid her retinue,

And bade her servants carve a cedar chest
With all the wonder of this history,
Within whose scented womb their limbs should rest
Where olive-trees make tender the blue sky
On the low hills of Paphos, and the fawn
Pipes in the noonday, and the nightingale sings on till dawn.

Nor failed they to obey her hest, and ere
The morning bee had stung the daffodil
With tiny fretful spear, or from its lair
The waking stag had leapt across the rill
And roused the ousel, or the lizard crept
Athwart the sunny rock, beneath the grass their bodies slept.

And when day brake, within that silver shrine
  Fed by the flames of cressets tremulous,
Queen Venus knelt and prayed to Proserpine
  That she whose beauty made Death amorous
Should beg a guerdon from her pallid Lord,
And let desire pass across dread Charon's icy
    ford.

III.

In melancholy moonless Acheron,
  Far from the goodly earth and joyous day,
Where no spring ever buds, nor ripening sun
  Weighs down the apple trees, nor flowery May
Checkers with chestnut blooms the grassy floor,
Where thrushes never sing, and piping linnets
    mate no more,

There by a dim and dark Lethæan well,
  Young Charmides was lying, wearily
He plucked the blossoms from the asphodel,
  And with its little rifled treasury
Strewed the dull waters of the dusky stream,
And watched the white stars founder, and the
    land was like a dream.

When as he gazed into the watery glass
And through his brown hair's curly tangles scanned
His own wan face, a shadow seemed to pass
Across the mirror, and a little hand
Stole into his, and warm lips timidly
Brushed his pale cheeks, and breathed their secret forth into a sigh.

Then turned he around his weary eyes and saw,
And ever nigher still their faces came,
And nigher ever did their young mouths draw
Until they seemed one perfect rose of flame,
And longing arms around her neck he cast,
And felt her throbbing bosom, and his breath came hot and fast,

And all his hoarded sweets were hers to kiss,
And all her maidenhood was his to slay,
And limb to limb in long and rapturous bliss
Their passion waxed and waned,—O why essay
To pipe again of love, too venturous reed!
Enough, enough that Erôs laughed upon that flowerless mead.

Too venturous poesy, O why essay
To pipe again of passion! fold thy wings
O'er daring Icarus and bid thy lay
Sleep hidden in the lyre's silent strings,
Till thou hast found the old Castilian rill,
Or from the Lesbian waters plucked drowned
Sappho's golden quill!

Enough, enough that he whose life had been
A fiery pulse of sin, a splendid shame,
Could in the loveless land of Hades glean
One scorching harvest from those fields of flame
Where passion walks with naked unshod feet
And is not wounded,—ah! enough that once
their lips could meet

In that wild throb when all existences
Seem narrowed to one single ecstasy
Which dies through its own sweetness and the stress
Of too much pleasure, ere Persephone
Had bade them serve her by the ebon throne
Of the pale God who in the fields of Enna
loosed her zone.

Flowers of Gold

IMPRESSIONS.

I.

LES SILHOUETTES.

The sea is flecked with bars of gray,
The dull dead wind is out of tune,
And like a withered leaf the moon
Is blown across the stormy bay.

Etched clear upon the pallid sand
The black boat lies: a sailor boy
Clambers aboard in careless joy
With laughing face and gleaming hand.

And overhead the curlews cry,
Where through the dusky upland grass
The young brown-throated reapers pass,
Like silhouettes against the sky.

II.

LA FUITE DE LA LUNE.

To outer senses there is peace,
A dreamy peace on either hand,
Deep silence in the shadowy land,
Deep silence where the shadows cease.

Save for a cry that echoes shrill
From some lone bird disconsolate;
A corncrake calling to its mate;
The answer from the misty hill.

And suddenly the moon withdraws
Her sickle from the lightening skies,
And to her sombre cavern flies,
Wrapped in a veil of yellow gauze.

THE GRAVE OF KEATS.

Rid of the world's injustice, and his pain,
He rests at last beneath God's veil of blue:
Taken from life when life and love were new
The youngest of the martyrs here is lain,
Fair as Sebastian, and as early slain.
No cypress shades his grave, no funeral yew,
But gentle violets weeping with the dew
Weave on his bones an ever-blossoming chain.
O proudest heart that broke for misery!
O sweetest lips since those of Mitylene!
O poet-painter of our English land!
Thy name was writ in water——it shall stand:
And tears like mine will keep thy memory green,
As Isabella did her Basil tree.

ROME.

THEOCRITUS.

A VILLANELLE.

O Singer of Persephone!
  In the dim meadows desolate
Dost thou remember Sicily?

Still through the ivy flits the bee
  Where Amaryllis lies in state;
O Singer of Persephone!

Simætha calls on Hecate
  And hears the wild dogs at the gate;
Dost thou remember Sicily?

Still by the light and laughing sea
  Poor Polypheme bemoans his fate;
O Singer of Persephone!

And still in boyish rivalry
  Young Daphnis challenges his mate:
Dost thou remember Sicily?

Slim Lacon keeps a goat for thee,
  For thee the jocund shepherds wait,
O Singer of Persephone!
Dost thou remember Sicily?

IN THE GOLD ROOM.

A HARMONY.

Her ivory hands on the ivory keys
  Strayed in a fitful fantasy,
Like the silver gleam when the poplar trees
  Rustle their pale leaves listlessly,
  Or the drifting foam of a restless sea
When the waves show their teeth in the flying
    breeze.

Her gold hair fell on the wall of gold
  Like the delicate gossamer tangles spun
On the burnished disk of the marigold,
  Or the sun-flower turning to meet the sun
  When the gloom of the jealous night is done,
And the spear of the lily is aureoled.

And her sweet red lips on these lips of mine
  Burned like the ruby fire set
In the swinging lamp of a crimson shrine,
  Or the bleeding wounds of the pomegranate,
  Or the heart of the lotus drenched and wet
With the spilt-out blood of the rose-red wine.

BALLADE DE MARGUERITE.

(NORMANDE.)

I am weary of lying within the chase
When the knights are meeting in market-place.

Nay, go not thou to the red-roofed town
Lest the hooves of the war-horse tread thee down.

But I would not go where the Squires ride,
I would only walk by my Lady's side.

Alack! and alack! thou art over bold,
A Forester's son may not eat off gold.

Will she love me the less that my Father is seen
Each Martinmas day in a doublet green?

Perchance she is sewing at tapestrie,
Spindle and loom are not meet for thee.

Ah, if she is working the arras bright
I might ravel the threads by the fire-light.

Perchance she is hunting of the deer,
How could you follow o'er hill and mere?

Ah, if she is riding with the court,
I might run beside her and wind the morte.

Perchance she is kneeling in S. Denys,
(On her soul may our Lady have gramercy!)

Ah, if she is praying in lone chapelle,
I might swing the censer and ring the bell.

Come in my son, for you look sae pale,
Thy father shall fill thee a stoup of ale.

But who are these knights in bright array?
Is it a pageant the rich folks play?

'Tis the King of England from over sea,
Who has come unto visit our fair countrie.

But why does the curfew toll sae low
And why do the mourners walk a-row?

O 'tis Hugh of Amiens my sister's son
Who is lying stark, for his day is done.

Nay, nay, for I see white lilies clear,
It is no strong man who lies on the bier.

O 'tis old Dame Jeannette that kept the hall,
I knew she would die at the autumn fall.

Dame Jeannette had not that gold-brown hair,
Old Jeannette was not a maiden fair.

O 'tis none of our kith and none of our kin,
(Her soul may our Lady assoil from sin!)

But I hear the boy's voice chanting sweet,
"Elle est morte, la Marguerite."

Come in, my son, and lie on the bed,
And let the dead folk bury their dead.

O mother, you know I loved her true:
O mother, hath one grave room for two?

THE DOLE OF THE KING'S DAUGHTER.

(BRETON.)

Seven stars in the still water,
And seven in the sky;
Seven sins on the King's daughter,
Deep in her soul to lie.

Red roses are at her feet,
(Roses are red in her red-gold hair,)
And O where her bosom and girdle meet
Red roses are hidden there.

Fair is the knight who lieth slain
Amid the rush and reed,
See the lean fishes that are fain
Upon dead men to feed.

Sweet is the page that lieth there,
(Cloth of gold is goodly prey,)
See the black ravens in the air,
Black, O black as the night are they.

What do they there so stark and dead?
(There is blood upon her hand)
Why are the lilies flecked with red?
(There is blood on the river sand.)

There are two that ride from the south and east,
And two from the north and west,
For the black raven a goodly feast,
For the King's daughter rest.

There is one man who loves her true
(Red, O red, is the stain of gore!)
He hath duggen a grave by the darksome yew,
(One grave will do for four.)

No moon in the still heaven,
In the black water none,
The sins on her soul are seven,
The sin upon his is one.

AMOR INTELLECTUALIS.

Oft have we trod the vales of Castaly
And heard sweet notes of sylvan music blown
From antique reeds to common folk unknown
And often launched our bark upon that sea
Which the nine muses hold in empery,
And plowed free furrows through the wave and foam,
Nor spread reluctant sail for more safe home
Till we had freighted well our argosy.
Of which despoilèd treasures these remain,
Sordello's passion, and the honeyed line
Of young Endymion, lordly Tamburlaine
Driving his pampered jades, and more than these,
The seven-fold vision of the Florentine,
And grave-browed Milton's solemn harmonies.

SANTA DECCA.

The Gods are dead: no longer do we bring
  To gray-eyed Pallas crowns of olive-leaves!
  Demeter's child no more hath tithe of sheaves,
And in the noon the careless shepherds sing,
For Pan is dead, and all the wantoning
  By secret glade and devious haunt is o'er:
  Young Hylas seeks the water-springs no more;
Great Pan is dead, and Mary's Son is King.

And yet—perchance in this sea-trancèd isle,
  Chewing the bitter fruit of memory,
  Some God lies hidden in the asphodel.
Ah Love! if such there be then it were well
  For us to fly his anger: nay, but see
  The leaves are stirring: let us watch a-while.

CORFU.

A VISION.

Two crownèd Kings, and One that stood alone
With no green weight of laurels round his head,
But with sad eyes as one uncomforted,
And wearied with man's never-ceasing moan
For sins no bleating victim can atone,
And sweet long lips with tears and kisses fed.
Girt was he in a garment black and red,
And at his feet I marked a broken stone
Which sent up lilies, dove-like, to his knees.
Now at their sight, my heart being lit with flame
I cried to Beatricé, "Who are these?"
"Æschylus first, the second Sophokles,
And last (wide stream of tears!) Euripides."

IMPRESSION DE VOYAGE.

The sea was sapphire colored, and the sky
  Burned like a heated opal through the air,
  We hoisted sail; the wind was blowing fair
For the blue lands that to the eastward lie.
From the steep prow I marked with quickening
      eye
  Zakynthos, every olive grove and creek,
  Ithaca's cliff, Lycaon's snowy peak,
And all the flower-strewn hills of Arcady.
The flapping of the sail against the mast,
  The ripple of the water on the side,
  The ripple of girls' laughter at the stern,
The only sounds:—when 'gan the West to burn,
  And a red sun upon the seas to ride,
  I stood upon the soil of Greece at last!

KATAKOLO.

THE GRAVE OF SHELLEY.

Like burnt-out torches by a sick man's bed
  Gaunt cypress-trees stand round the sun-bleached stone;
  Here doth the little night-owl make her throne,
And the slight lizard show his jewelled head.
And, where the chaliced poppies flame to red,
  In the still chamber of yon pyramid
  Surely some Old-World Sphinx lurks darkly hid,
Grim warder of this pleasaunce of the dead.

Ah! sweet indeed to rest within the womb
  Of Earth, great mother of eternal sleep,
But sweeter far for thee a restless tomb
  In the blue cavern of an echoing deep,
Or where the tall ships founder in the gloom
  Against the rocks of some wave-shattered steep.

ROME.

BY THE ARNO.

The oleander on the wall
Grows crimson in the dawning light,
Though the gray shadows of the night
Lie yet on Florence like a pall.

The dew is bright upon the hill,
And bright the blossoms overhead,
But ah! the grasshoppers have fled,
The little Attic song is still.

Only the leaves are gently stirred
By the soft breathing of the gale,
And in the almond-scented vale
The lonely nightingale is heard.

The day will make thee silent soon,
O nightingale sing on for love!
While yet upon the shadowy grove
Splinter the arrows of the moon.

Before across the silent lawn
In sea-green mist the morning steals,
And to love's frightened eyes reveals
The long white fingers of the dawn.

Fast climbing up the eastern sky
To grasp and slay the shuddering night
All careless of my heart's delight,
Or if the nightingale should die.

Impressions de Théâtre

FABIEN DEI FRANCHI.

TO MY FRIEND HENRY IRVING.

The silent room, the heavy creeping shade,
The dead that travel fast, the opening door,
The murdered brother rising through the floor,
The ghost's white fingers on thy shoulders laid,
And then the lonely duel in the glade,
The broken swords, the stifled scream, the gore,
Thy grand revengeful eyes when all is o'er,—
These things are well enough,—but thou wert made
For more august creation! frenzied Lear
Should at thy bidding wander on the heath
With the shrill fool to mock him, Romeo
For thee should lure his love, and desperate fear
Pluck Richard's recreant dagger from its sheath—
Thou trumpet set for Shakespeare's lips to blow!

PHÈDRE.

TO SARAH BERNHARDT.

How vain and dull this common world must
seem
To such a One as thou, who should'st have
talked
At Florence with Mirandola, or walked
Through the cool olives of the Academe:
Thou should'st have gathered reeds from a
green stream
For goat-foot Pan's shrill piping, and have
played
With the white girls in that Phæacian glade
Where grave Odysseus wakened from his dream.

Ah! surely once some urn of Attic clay
Held thy wan dust, and thou hast come again
Back to this common world so dull and vain,
For thou wert weary of the sunless day,
The heavy fields of scentless asphodel,
The loveless lips with which men kiss in Hell.

WRITTEN AT THE LYCEUM THEATRE.

I

PORTIA.

TO ELLEN TERRY.

I marvel not Bassanio was so bold
To peril all he had upon the lead,
Or that proud Arragon bent low his head,
Or that Morocco's fiery heart grew cold:
For in that gorgeous dress of beaten gold
Which is more golden than the golden sun,
No woman Veronesé looked upon
Was half so fair as thou whom I behold.
Yet fairer when with wisdom as your shield
The sober-suited lawyer's gown you donned
And would not let the laws of Venice yield
Antonio's heart to that accursèd Jew—
O Portia! take my heart; it is thy due:
I think I will not quarrel with the bond.

II

QUEEN HENRIETTA MARIA.

TO ELLEN TERRY.

In the lone tent, waiting for victory,
She stands with eyes marred by the mists of pain,
Like some wan lily overdrenched with rain;
The clamorous clang of arms, the ensanguined sky,
War's ruin, and the wreck of chivalry,
To her proud soul no common fear can bring:
Bravely she tarrieth for her Lord the King,
Her soul a-flame with passionate ecstasy.
O Hair of Gold! O crimson lips! O Face
Made for the luring and the love of man!
With thee I do forget the toil and stress,
The loveless road that knows no resting place,
Time's straitened pulse, the soul's dread weariness,
My freedom and my life republican!

III

CAMMA.

TO ELLEN TERRY.

As one who poring on a Grecian urn
  Scans the fair shapes some Attic hand hath made,
  God with slim goddess, goodly man with maid,
And for their beauty's sake is loath to turn
And face the obvious day, must I not yearn
  For many a secret moon of indolent bliss,
  When in the midmost shrine of Artemis
I see thee standing, antique-limbed, and stern?

And yet—methinks I'd rather see thee play
  That serpent of old Nile, whose witchery
Made Emperors drunken,—come, great Egypt, shake
  Our stage with all thy mimic pageants! Nay,
  I am growing sick of unreal passions, make
The world thine Actium, me thine Antony!

Panthea

PANTHEA.

Nay, let us walk from fire unto fire,
From passionate pain to deadlier delight,—
I am too young to live without desire,
Too young art thou to waste this summer night
Asking those idle questions which of old
Man sought of seer and oracle, and no reply was told.

For, sweet, to feel is better than to know,
And wisdom is a childless heritage,
One pulse of passion—youth's first fiery glow,—
Are worth the hoarded proverbs of the sage:
Vex not thy soul with dead philosophy,
Have we not lips to kiss with, hearts to love, and eyes to see!

Dost thou not hear the murmuring nightingale
  Like water bubbling from a silver jar?
So soft she sings the envious moon is pale,
  That high in heaven she is hung so far
She cannot hear that love-enraptured tune,—
Mark how she wreathes each horn with mist, yon
    late and laboring moon.

White lilies, in whose cups the gold bees dream,
  The fallen snow of petals where the breeze
Scatters the chestnut blossom, or the gleam
  Of all our endless sins, our vain endeavour
Enough for thee, dost thou desire more?
Alas! the Gods will give naught else from their
    eternal store.

For our high Gods have sick and wearied grown
  Of boyish limbs in water,—are not these
For wasted days of youth to make atone
  By pain or prayer or priest, and never, never,
Hearken they now to either good or ill,
But send their rain upon the just and the unjust
    at will?

They sit at ease, our Gods they sit at ease,
Strewing with leaves of rose their scented wine,
They sleep, they sleep, beneath the rocking trees
Where asphodel and yellow lotus twine,
Mourning the old glad days before they knew
What evil things the heart of man could dream, and dreaming do.

And far beneath the brazen floor, they see
Like swarming flies the crowd of little men,
The bustle of small lives, then wearily
Back to their lotus-haunts they turn again
Kissing each other's mouths, and mix more deep
The poppy-seeded draught which brings soft purple-lidded sleep.

There all day long the golden-vestured sun,
Their torch-bearer, stands with his torch a-blaze,
And when the gaudy web of noon is spun
By its twelve maidens through the crimson haze
Fresh from Endymion's arms comes forth the moon,
And the immortal Gods in toils of mortal passions swoon.

There walks Queen Juno through some dewy
mead,
Her grand white feet flecked with the saffron
dust
Of wind-stirred lilies, while young Ganymede
Leaps in the hot and amber-foaming must,
His curls all tossed, as when the eagle bare
The frightened boy from Ida through the blue
Ionian air.

There in the green heart of some garden close
Queen Venus with the shepherd at her side,
Her warm soft body like the brier rose
Which would be white yet blushes at its pride,
Laughs low for love, till jealous Salmacis
Peers through the myrtle-leaves and sighs for
pain of lonely bliss.

There never does that dreary north-wind blow
Which leaves our English forests bleak and
bare,
Nor ever falls the swift white-feathered snow,
Nor doth the red-toothed lightning ever dare
To wake them in the silver-fretted night
When we lie weeping for some sweet sad sin,
some dead delight.

Alas! they know the far Lethæan spring,
The violet-hidden waters well they know,
Where one whose feet with tired wandering
Are faint and broken may take heart and go,
And from those dark depths cool and crystalline
Drink, and draw balm, and sleep for sleepless souls, and anodyne.

But we oppress our natures, God or Fate
Is our enemy, we starve and feed
On vain repentance—O we are born too late!
What balm for us in bruisèd poppy seed
Who crowd into one finite pulse of time
The joy of infinite love and the fierce pain of infinite crime.

O we are wearied of this sense of guilt,
Wearied of pleasure's paramour despair,
Wearied of every temple we have built,
Wearied of every right, unanswered prayer,
For man is weak; God sleeps: and heaven is high:
One fiery-colored moment: one great love: and lo! we die.

Ah! but no ferry-man with laboring pole
Nears his black shallop to the flowerless strand,
No little coin of bronze can bring the soul
Over Death's river to the sunless land,
Victim and wine and vow are all in vain,
The tomb is sealed; the soldiers watch; the dead rise not again.

We are resolved into the supreme air,
We are made one with what we touch and see,
With our heart's blood each crimson sun is fair,
With our young lives each spring-impassioned tree
Flames into green, the wildest beasts that range
The moor our kinsmen are, all life is one, and all is change.

With beat of systole and of diastole
One grand great life throbs through earth's giant heart,
And mighty waves of single Being roll
From nerve-less germ to man, for we are part
Of every rock and bird and beast and hill,
One with the things that prey on us, and one with what we kill.

From lower cells of waking life we pass
To full perfection; thus the world grows old:
We who are godlike now were once a mass
Of quivering purple flecked with bars of gold,
Unsentient or of joy or misery,
And tossed in terrible tangles of some wild and
wind-swept sea.

This hot hard flame with which our bodies burn
Will make some meadow blaze with daffodil,
Ay! and those argent breasts of thine will turn
To water-lilies; the brown fields men till
Will be more fruitful for our love to-night,
Nothing is lost in nature, all things live in
Death's despite.

The boy's first kiss, the hyacinth's first bell,
The man's last passion, and the last red spear
That from the lily leaps, the asphodel
Which will not let its blossoms blow for fear
Of too much beauty, and the timid shame
Of the young bridegroom at his lover's eyes,—
these with the same

One sacrament are consecrate, the earth
Not we alone hath passions hymeneal,
The yellow buttercups that shake for mirth
At daybreak know a pleasure not less real
Than we do, when in some fresh-blossoming wood
We draw the spring into our hearts, and feel that life is good.

So when men bury us beneath the yew
Thy crimson-stainèd mouth a rose will be,
And thy soft eyes lush bluebells dimmed with dew,
And when the white narcissus wantonly
Kisses the wind its playmate, some faint joy
Will thrill our dust, and we will be again fond maid and boy.

And thus without life's conscious torturing pain
In some sweet flower we will feel the sun,
And from the linnet's throat will sing again,
And as two gorgeous-mailèd snakes will run
Over our graves, or as two tigers creep
Through the hot jungle where the yellow-eyed huge lions sleep

And give them battle! How my heart leaps up
To think of that grand living after death
In beast and bird and flower, when this cup,
Being filled too full of spirit, bursts for breath,
And with the pale leaves of some autumn day
The soul earth's earliest conqueror becomes earth's last great prey.

O think of it! We shall inform ourselves
Into all sensuous life, the goat-foot Faun,
The Centaur, or the merry bright-eyed Elves
That leave their dancing rings to spite the dawn
Upon the meadows, shall not be more near
Than you and I to nature's mysteries, for we shall hear

The thrush's heart beat, and the daisies grow,
And the wan snowdrop sighing for the sun
On sunless days in winter, we shall know
By whom the silver gossamer is spun,
Who paints the diapered fritillaries,
On what wide wings from shivering pine to pine the eagle flies.

Ay! had we never loved at all, who knows
If yonder daffodil had lured the bee
Into its gilded womb, or any rose
Had hung with crimson lamps its little tree!
Methinks no leaf would ever bud in spring,
But for the lovers' lips that kiss, the poet's lips
that sing.

Is the light vanished from our golden sun,
Or is this dædal-fashioned earth less fair,
That we are nature's heritors, and one
With every pulse of life that beats the air?
Rather new suns across the sky shall pass,
New splendour come unto the flower, new glory
to the grass.

And we two lovers shall not sit afar,
Critics of nature, but the joyous sea
Shall be our raiment, and the bearded star
Shoot arrows at our pleasure! We shall be
Part of the mighty universal whole,
And through all æons mix and mingle with the
Kosmic Soul!

We shall be notes in that great Symphony
Whose cadence circles through the rhythmic spheres,
And all the live World's throbbing heart shall be
One with our heart, the stealthy creeping years
Have lost their terrors now, we shall not die,
The Universe itself shall be our Immortality!

The Fourth Movement

IMPRESSION

LE RÉVEILLON.

The sky is laced with fitful red,
The circling mists and shadows flee,
The dawn is rising from the sea,
Like a white lady from her bed.

And jagged brazen arrows fall
Athwart the feathers of the night,
And a long wave of yellow light
Breaks silently on tower and hall,

And spreading wide across the wold
Wakes into flight some fluttering bird,
And all the chestnut tops are stirred,
And all the branches streaked with gold.

AT VERONA.

How steep the stairs within Kings' houses are
For exile-wearied feet as mine to tread,
And O how salt and bitter is the bread
Which falls from this Hound's table,—better far
That I had died in the red ways of war,
Or that the gate of Florence bare my head,
Than to live thus, by all things comraded
Which seek the essence of my soul to mar.

"Curse God and die: what better hope than this?
He hath forgotten thee in all the bliss
Of his gold city, and eternal day"—
Nay peace: behind my prison's blinded bars
I do possess what none can take away,
My love, and all the glory of the stars.

APOLOGIA.

Is it thy will that I should wax and wane,
  Barter my cloth of gold for hodden gray,
And at thy pleasure weave that web of pain
  Whose brightest threads are each a wasted day?

Is it thy will—Love that I love so well —
  That my Soul's House should be a tortured spot
Wherein, like evil paramours, must dwell
  The quenchless flame, the worm that dieth not?

Nay, if it be thy will I shall endure,
  And sell ambition at the common mart,
And let dull failure be my vestiture,
  And sorrow dig its grave within my heart.

Perchance it may be better so—at least
  I have not made my heart a heart of stone,
Nor starved my boyhood of its goodly feast,
  Nor walked where Beauty is a thing unknown.

Many a man hath done so; sought to fence
In straitened bonds the soul that should be free,
Trodden the dusty road of common sense,
While all the forest sang of liberty,

Not marking how the spotted hawk in flight
Passed on wide pinion through the lofty air,
To where the steep untrodden mountain height
Caught the last tresses of the Sun God's hair.

Or how the little flower he trod upon,
The daisy, that white-feathered shield of gold,
Followed with wistful eyes the wandering sun
Content if once its leaves were aureoled.

But surely it is something to have been
The best belovèd for a little while,
To have walked hand in hand with Love, and seen
His purple wings flit once across thy smile.

Ay! though the gorgèd asp of passion feed
On my boy's heart, yet have I burst the bars,
Stood face to face with Beauty, known indeed
The Love which moves the Sun and all the stars!

QUIA MULTUM AMAVI.

Dear Heart, I think the young impassioned priest
  When first he takes from out the hidden shrine
His God imprisoned in the Eucharist,
  And eats the bread, and drinks the dreadful
    wine,

Feels not such awful wonder as I felt
  When first my smitten eyes beat full on thee,
And all night long before thy feet I knelt
  Till thou wert wearied of Idolatry.

Ah! had'st thou liked me less and loved me more,
  Through all those summer days of joy and
    rain,
I had not now been sorrow's heritor,
  Or stood a lackey in the House of Pain.

Yet, though remorse, youth's white-faced sen-
    eschal
  Tread on my heels with all his retinue,
I am most glad I loved thee—think of all
  The suns that go to make one speedwell blue!

SILENTIUM AMORIS.

As oftentimes the too resplendent sun
  Hurries the pallid and reluctant moon
Back to her sombre cave, ere she hath won
  A single ballad from the nightingale,
  So doth thy Beauty make my lips to fail,
And all my sweetest singing out of tune.

And as at dawn across the level mead
  On wings impetuous some wind will come,
And with its too harsh kisses break the reed
  Which was its only instrument of song,
  So my too stormy passions work me wrong,
And for excess of Love my Love is dumb.

But surely unto thee mine eyes did show
  Why I am silent, and my lute unstrung;
Else it were better we should part, and go,
  Thou to some lips of sweeter melody,
  And I to nurse the barren memory
Of unkissed kisses, and songs never sung.

HER VOICE.

The wild bee reels from bough to bough
With his furry coat and his gauzy wing.
Now in a lily-cup, and now
Setting a jacinth bell a-swing,
In his wandering;
Sit closer, love: it was here I trow
I made that vow,

Swore that two lives should be like one
As long as the sea-gull loved the sea,
As long as the sunflower sought the sun—
It shall be, I said, for eternity
'Twixt you and me!
Dear friend, those times are over and done,
Love's web is spun.

Look upward where the poplar trees
Sway and sway in the summer air,
Here in the valley never a breeze
Scatters the thistledown, but there
Great winds blow fair:

From the mighty murmuring mystical seas,
And the wave-lashed leas.

Look upward where the white gull screams,
What does it see that we do not see?
Is that a star? or the lamp that gleams
On some outward voyaging argosy,—
Ah! can it be
We have lived our lives in land of dreams?
How sad it seems.

Sweet, there is nothing left to say
But this, that love is never lost.
Keen winter stabs the breasts of May
Whose crimson roses burst his frost,
Ships tempest-tossed
Will find a harbour in some bay,
And so we may.

And there is nothing left to do
But to kiss once again, and part,
Nay, there is nothing we should rue,
I have my beauty,—you your Art,
Nay, do not start,
One world was not enough for two
Like me and you.

MY VOICE.

Within this restless, hurried, modern world
We took our heart's full pleasure—You and I,
And now the white sails of our ship are furled,
And spent the lading of our argosy.

Wherefore my cheeks before their time are wan,
For very weeping is my gladness fled,
Sorrow hath paled my lip's vermilion,
And Ruin draws the curtains of my bed.

But all this crowded life has been to thee
No more than lyre, or lute, or subtle spell
Of viols, or the music of the sea
That sleeps, a mimic echo, in the shell.

TÆDIUM VITÆ.

To stab my youth with desperate knife, to wear
This paltry age's gaudy livery,
To let each base hand filch my treasury,
To mesh my soul within a woman's hair,
And be mere Fortune's lackeyed groom,—I swear,
I love it not! these things are less to me
Than the thin foam that frets upon the sea,
Less than the thistle-down of summer air
Which hath no seed: better to stand aloof
Far from these slanderous fools who mock my life
Knowing me not, better the lowliest roof
Fit for the meanest hind to sojourn in,
Than to go back to that hoarse cave of strife
Where my white soul first kissed the mouth of sin.

Humanitad

HUMANITAD.

It is full winter now: the trees are bare,
Save where the cattle huddle from the cold
Beneath the pine, for it doth never wear
The Autumn's gaudy livery whose gold
Her jealous brother pilfers, but is true
To the green doublet; bitter is the wind, as
though it blew

From Saturn's cave; a few thin wisps of hay
Lie on the sharp black hedges, where the wain
Dragged the sweet pillage of a summer's day
From the low meadows up the narrow lane;
Upon the half-thawed snow the bleating sheep
Press close against the hurdles, and the shivering
housedogs creep

From the shut stable to the frozen stream
  And back again disconsolate, and miss
The bawling shepherds and the noisy team;
  And overhead in circling listlessness
The cawing rooks whirl round the frosted stack,
Or crowd the dripping boughs; and in the fen
    the ice-pools crack

Where the gaunt bittern stalks among the reeds
  And flaps his wings, and stretches back his
    neck,
And hoots to see the moon; across the meads
  Limps the poor frightened hare, a little speck;
And a stray seamew with its fretful cry
Flits like a sudden drift of snow against the
    dull gray sky.

Full winter: and a lusty goodman brings
  His load of faggots from the chilly byre,
And stamps his feet upon the hearth, and flings
  The sappy billets on the waning fire,
And laughs to see the sudden lightning scare
His children at their play; and yet,—the Spring
    is in the air,

Already the slim crocus stirs the snow,
And soon yon blanchèd fields will bloom again
With nodding cowslips for some lad to mow,
For with the first warm kisses of the rain
The winter's icy sorrow breaks to tears,
And the brown thrushes mate, and with bright eyes the rabbit peers

From the dark warren where the fir-cones lie,
And treads one snowdrop under foot and runs
Over the mossy knoll, and blackbirds fly
Across our path at evening, and the suns
Stay longer with us; ah! how good to see
Grass-girdled Spring in all her joy of laughing greenery

Dance through the hedges till the early rose,
(That sweet repentance of the thorny briar!)
Burst from its sheathèd emerald and disclose
The little quivering disk of golden fire
Which the bees know so well, for with it come
Pale boy's love, sops-in-wine, and daffodillies all in bloom.

Then up and down the field the sower goes,
  While close behind the laughing younker scares,
With shrilly whoop the black and thievish crows.
  And then the chestnut-tree its glory wears,
And on the grass the creamy blossom falls
In odorous excess, and faint half-whispered madrigals

Steal from the bluebells' nodding carillons
  Each breezy morn, and then white jessamine,
That star of its own heaven, snapdragons
  With lolling crimson tongues, and eglantine
In dusty velvets clad usurp the bed
And woodland empery, and when the lingering rose hath shed

Red leaf by leaf its folded panoply,
  And pansies closed their purple-lidded eyes,
Chrysanthemums from gilded argosy
  Unload their gaudy scentless merchandise
And violets getting overbold withdraw
From their shy nooks, and scarlet berries dot the leafless haw.

O happy field! and O thrice happy tree!
Soon will your queen in daisy-flowered smock,
And crown of flower-de-luce trip down the lea,
Soon will the lazy shepherds drive their flock
Back to the pasture by the pool, and soon
Through the green leaves will float the hum of murmuring bees at noon.

Soon will the glade be bright with bellamour,
The flower which wantons love, and those sweet nuns
Vale-lilies in their snowy vestiture
Will tell their beaded pearls, and carnations
With mitred dusky leaves will scent the wind,
And straggling traveller's joy each hedge with yellow stars will bind.

Dear Bride of Nature and most bounteous Spring!
That can'st give increase to the sweet-breath'd kine,
And to the kid its little horns, and bring
The soft and silky blossoms to the vine,
Where is that old nepenthe which of yore
Man got from poppy root and glossy-berried mandragore?

There was a time when any common bird
  Could make me sing in unison, a time
When all the strings of boyish life were stirred
  To quick response or more melodious rhyme
By every forest idyll;—do I change?
Or rather doth some evil thing through thy fair
    pleasaunce range?

Nay, nay, thou art the same: 'tis I who seek
  To vex with sighs thy simple solitude,
And because fruitless tears bedew my cheek
  Would have thee weep with me in brother-
    hood;
Fool! shall each wronged and restless spirit dare
To taint such wine with the salt poison of his
    own despair!

Thou art the same: 'tis I whose wretched soul
  Takes discontent to be its paramour,
And gives its kingdom to the rude control
  Of what should be its servitor,—for sure
Wisdom is somewhere, though the stormy sea
Contain it not, and the huge deep answer "'Tis
    not in me."

To burn with one clear flame, to stand erect
In natural honor, not to bend the knee
In profitless prostrations whose effect
Is by itself condemned, what alchemy
Can teach me this? what herb Medea brewed
Will bring the unexultant peace of essence not subdued?

The minor chord which ends the harmony,
And for its answering brother waits in vain,
Sobbing for incompleted melody
Dies a swan's death; but I the heir of pain
A silent Memnon with blank lidless eyes
Wait for the light and music of those suns which never rise.

The quenched-out torch, the lonely cypress-gloom,
The little dust stored in the narrow urn,
The gentle XAIPE of the Attic tomb,—
Were not these better far than to return
To my old fitful restless malady,
Or spend my days within the voiceless cave of misery?

Nay! for perchance that poppy-crownèd God
  Is like the watcher by a sick man's bed
Who talks of sleep but gives it not; his rod
  Hath lost its virtue, and, when all is said,
Death is too rude, too obvious a key
To solve one single secret in a life's philosophy.

And Love! that noble madness, whose august
  And inextinguishable might can slay
The soul with honeyed drugs,—alas! I must
  From such sweet ruin play the runaway,
Although too constant memory never can
Forget the archèd splendor of those brows
    Olympian

Which for a little season made my youth
  So soft a swoon of exquisite indolence
That all the chiding of more prudent Truth
  Seemed the thin voice of jealousy,—O hence
Thou huntress deadlier than Artemis!
Go seek some other quarry! for of thy too
    perilous bliss

My lips have drunk enough,—no more, no
    more,—
  Though Love himself should turn his gilded
    prow

Back to the troubled waters of this shore
Where I am wrecked and stranded, even now
The chariot wheels of passion sweep too near,
Hence! Hence! I pass unto a life more barren,
more austere.

More barren—ay, those arms will never lean
Down through the trellised vines and draw
my soul
In sweet reluctance through the tangled green;
Some other head must wear that aureole,
For I am Hers who loves not any man
Whose white and stainless bosom bears the sign
Gorgonian.

Let Venus go and chuck her dainty page,
And kiss his mouth, and toss his curly hair,
With net and spear and hunting equipage
Let young Adonis to his tryst repair,
But me her fond and subtle-fashioned spell
Delights no more, though I could win her dearest
citadel.

Ay, though I were that laughing shepherd boy
Who from Mount Ida saw the little cloud
Pass over Tenedos and lofty Troy
And knew the coming of the Queen, and bowed

In wonder at her feet, not for the sake
Of a new Helen would I bid her hand the apple
take.

Then rise supreme Athena argent-limbed!
And, if my lips be musicless, inspire
At least my life: was not thy glory hymned
By One who gave to thee his sword and lyre
Like Æschylus at well-fought Marathon,
And died to show that Milton's England still
could bear a son!

And yet I cannot tread the portico
And live without desire, fear and pain,
Or nurture that wise calm which long ago
The grave Athenian master taught to men,
Self-poised, self-centred, and self-comforted,
To watch the world's vain phantasies go by with
unbowed head.

Alas! that serene brow, those eloquent lips,
Those eyes that mirrored all eternity,
Rest in their own Colonos, an eclipse
Hath come on Wisdom, and Mnemosyne

Is childless; in the night which she had made
For lofty secure flight Athena's owl itself hath
strayed.

Nor much with Science do I care to climb,
Although by strange and subtle witchery
She draw the moon from heaven: the Muse of
Time
Unrolls her gorgeous-colored tapestry
To no less eager eyes; often indeed
In the great epic of Polymnia's scroll I love to
read

How Asia sent her myriad hosts to war
Against a little town, and panoplied
In gilded mail with jewelled scimitar,
White-shielded, purple-crested, rode the Mede
Between the waving poplars and the sea
Which men call Artemisium, till he saw Ther-
mopylæ

Its steep ravine spanned by a narrow wall,
And on the nearer side a little brood
Of careless lions holding festival!
And stood amazèd at such hardihood,

And pitched his tent upon the reedy shore,
And stayed two days to wonder, and then crept
at midnight o'er

Some unfrequented height, and coming down
The autumn forests treacherously slew
What Sparta held most dear and was the crown
Of far Eurotas, and passed on, nor knew
How God had staked an evil net for him
In the small bay of Salamis,—and yet, the page
grows dim.

Its cadenced Greek delights me not, I feel
With such a goodly time too out of tune
To love it much: for like the Dial's wheel
That from its blinded darkness strikes the
noon
Yet never sees the sun, so do my eyes
Restlessly follow that which from my cheated
vision flies.

O for one grand unselfish simple life
To teach us what is Wisdom! speak, ye hills
Of lone Helvellyn, for this note of strife
Shunned your untroubled crags and crystal
rills,

Where is that Spirit which living blamelessly
Yet dared to kiss the smitten mouth of his own
century!

Speak ye Rydalian laurels! where is He
Whose gentle head ye sheltered, that pure soul
Whose gracious days of uncrowned majesty
Through lowliest conduct touched the lofty
goal
Where Love and Duty mingle! Him at least
The most high Laws were glad of, he had sat at
Wisdom's feast,

But we are Learning's changelings, know by
rote
The clarion watchword of each Grecian school
And follow none, the flawless sword which smote
The pagan Hydra is an effete tool
Which we ourselves have blunted, what man now
Shall scale the august ancient heights and to old
Reverence bow?

One such indeed I saw, but, Ichabod!
Gone is that last dear son of Italy,
Who being man died for the sake of God,
And whose unrisen bones sleep peacefully.

O guard him, guard him well, my Giotto's tower,
Thou marble lily of the lily town! let not the
lower

Of the rude tempest vex his slumber, or
The Arno with its tawny troubled gold
O'erleap its marge, no mightier conqueror
Clomb the high Capitol in the days of old
When Rome was indeed Rome, for Liberty
Walked like a Bride beside him, at which sight
pale Mystery

Fled shrieking to her furthest somberest cell
With an old man who grabbled rusty keys,
Fled shuddering for that immemorial knell
With which oblivion buries dynasties
Swept like a wounded eagle on the blast,
As to the holy heart of Rome the great triumvir
passed.

He knew the holiest heart and heights of Rome,
He drave the base wolf from the lion's lair,
And now lies dead by that empyreal dome
Which overtops Valdarno hung in air

By Brunelleschi—O Melpomene
Breathe through thy melancholy pipe thy sweetest threnody!

Breathe through the tragic stops such melodies
That Joy's self may grow jealous, and the Nine
Forget a-while their discreet emperies,
Mourning for him who on Rome's lordliest shrine
Lit for men's lives the light of Marathon,
And bare to sun-forgotten fields the fire of the sun!

O guard him, guard him well, my Giotto's tower,
Let some young Florentine each eventide
Bring coronals of that enchanted flower
Which the dim woods of Vallombrosa hide,
And deck the marble tomb wherein he lies
Whose soul is as some mighty orb unseen of mortal eyes.

Some mighty orb whose cycled wanderings,
Being tempest-driven to the furthest rim
Where Chaos meets Creation and the wings
Of the eternal chanting Cherubim

Are pavilioned on Nothing, passed away
Into a moonless void—and yet, though he is dust
and clay,

He is not dead, the immemorial Fates
Forbid it, and the closing shears refrain,
Lift up your heads, ye everlasting gates!
Ye argent clarions sound a loftier strain!
For the vile thing he hated lurks within
Its sombre house, alone with God and memories
of sin.

Still what avails it that she sought her cave
That murderous mother of red harlotries?
At Munich on the marble architrave
The Grecian boys die smiling, but the seas
Which wash Ægina fret in loneliness
Not mirroring their beauty, so our lives grow
colourless

For lack of our ideals, if one star
Flame torch-like in the heavens the unjust
Swift daylight kills it, and no trump of war
Can wake to passionate voice the silent dust

Which was Mazzini once! rich Niobe
For all her stony sorrows hath her sons, but
Italy!

What Easter Day shall make her children rise,
Who were not Gods yet suffered? what sure
feet
Shall find their graveclothes folded? what clear
eyes
Shall see them bodily? O it were meet
To roll the stone from off the sepulchre
And kiss the bleeding roses of their wounds, in
love of Her

Our Italy! our mother visible!
Most blessed among nations and most sad,
For whose dear sake the young Calabrian fell
That day at Aspromonte and was glad
That in an age when God was bought and sold
One man could die for Liberty! but we, burnt
out and cold,

See Honour smitten on the cheek and gyves
Bind the sweet feet of Mercy: Poverty
Creeps through our sunless lanes and with sharp
knives
Cuts the warm throats of children stealthily,

And no word said:—O we are wretched men
Unworthy of our great inheritance! where is
the pen

Of austere Milton? where the mighty sword
Which slew its master righteously? the years
Have lost their ancient leader, and no word
Breaks from the voiceless tripod on our ears;
While as a ruined mother in some spasm
Bears a base child and loathes it, so our best
enthusiasm

Genders unlawful children, Anarchy
Freedom's own Judas, the vile prodigal
License who steals the gold of Liberty
And yet has nothing, Ignorance the real
One Fratricide since Cain, Envy the asp
That stings itself to anguish, Avarice whose
palsied grasp

Is in its extent stiffened, moneyed Greed
For whose dull appetite men waste away
Amid the whirr of wheels and are the seed
Of things which slay their sower, these each
day

Sees rife in England, and the gentle feet
Of Beauty tread no more the stones of each
unlovely street.

What even Cromwell spared is desecrated
By weed and worm, left to the stormy play
Of wind and beating snow, or renovated
By more destructful hands: Time's worst
decay
Will wreathe its ruins with some loveliness,
But these new Vandals can but make a rainproof
barrenness.

Where is that Art which bade the Angels sing
Through Lincoln's lofty choir, till the air
Seems from such marble harmonies to ring
With sweeter song than common lips can dare
To draw from actual reed? ah! where is now
The cunning hand which made the flowering
hawthorn branches bow

For Southwell's arch, and carved the House of
One
Who loved the lilies of the field with all
Our dearest English flowers? the same sun
Rises for us: the season's natural

Weave the same tapestry of green and gray:
The unchanged hills are with us: but that Spirit
hath passed away.

And yet perchance it may be better so,
For Tyranny is an incestuous Queen,
Murder her brother is her bedfellow,
And the Plague chambers with her: in obscene
And bloody paths her treacherous feet are set;
Better the empty desert and a soul inviolate!

For gentle brotherhood, the harmony
Of living in the healthful air, the swift
Clean beauty of strong limbs when men are free
And women chaste, these are the things which
lift
Our souls up more than even Agnolo's
Gaunt blinded Sibyl poring o'er the scroll of
human woes,

Or Titian's little maiden on the stair
White as her own sweet lily and as tall,
Or Mona Lisa smiling through her hair,—
Ah! somehow life is bigger after all

Than any painted angel could we see
The God that is within us! The old Greek
serenity

Which curbs the passion of that level line
Of marble youths, who with untroubled eyes
And chastened limbs ride round Athena's shrine
And mirror her divine economies,
And balanced symmetry of what in man
Would else wage ceaseless warfare,—this at least
within the span

Between our mother's kisses and the grave
Might so inform our lives, that we could win
Such mighty empires that from her cave
Temptation would grow hoarse, and pallid Sin
Would walk ashamed of his adulteries,
And Passion creep from out the House of Lust
with startled eyes.

To make the Body and the Spirit one
With all right things, till no thing live in vain
From morn to noon, but in sweet unison
With every pulse of flesh and throb of pain

The Soul in flawless essence high enthroned,
Against all outer vain attack invincibly bastioned,

Mark with serene impartiality
The strife of things, and yet be comforted,
Knowing that by the chain causality
All separate existences are wed
Into one supreme whole, whose utterance
Is joy, or holier praise! ah! surely this were governance

Of life in most august omnipresence,
Through which the rational intellect would find
In passion its expression, and mere sense,
Ignoble else, lend fire to the mind,
And being joined with it in harmony
More mystical than that which binds the stars planetary

Strike from their several tones one octave chord
Whose cadence being measureless would fly
Through all the circling spheres, then to its Lord
Return refreshed with its new empery

And more exultant power,—this indeed
Could we but reach it were to find the last, the
perfect creed.

Ah! it was easy when the world was young
To keep one's life free and inviolate,
From our sad lips another song is rung,
By our own hands our heads are desecrate,
Wanderers in drear exile, and dispossessed
Of what should be our own, we can but feed on
wild unrest.

Somehow the grace, the bloom of things has
flown,
And of all men we are most wretched who
Must live each other's lives and not our own
For very pity's sake and then undo
All that we live for—it was otherwise
When soul and body seemed to blend in mystic
symphonies.

But we have left those gentle haunts to pass
With weary feet to the new Calvary,
Where we behold, as one who in a glass
Sees his own face, self-slain Humanity,

And in the dumb reproach of that sad gaze
Learn what an awful phantom the red hand of
man can raise.

O smitten mouth! O forehead crowned with
thorn!
O chalice of all common miseries!
Thou for our sakes that loved thee not hast
borne
An agony of endless centuries,
And we were vain and ignorant nor knew
That when we stabbed thy heart it was our own
real hearts we slew.

Being ourselves the sowers and the seeds,
The night that covers and the lights that fade,
The spear that pierces and the side that bleeds,
The lips betraying and the life betrayed;
The deep hath calm: the moon hath rest: but we
Lords of the natural world are yet our own
dread enemy.

Is this the end of all that primal force
  Which, in its changes being still the same,
From eyeless Chaos cleft its upward course,
  Through ravenous seas and whirling rocks and flame,
Till the suns met in heaven and began
Their cycles, and the morning stars sang, and the Word was Man!

Nay, nay, we are but crucified, and though
  The bloody sweat falls from our brows like rain,
Loosen the nails—we shall come down I know,
  Stanch the red wounds—we shall be whole again,
No need have we of hyssop-laden rod,
That which is purely human, that is Godlike that is God.

Flower of Love

ΓΛΥΚΥΠΙΚΡΟΣ ΕΡΟΣ

Sweet, I blame you not, for mine the fault was,
had I not been made of common clay
I had climbed the higher heights unclimbed yet,
seen the fuller air, the larger day.

From the wildness of my wasted passion I had
struck a better, clearer song,
Lit some lighter light of freer freedom, battled
with some Hydra-headed wrong.

Had my lips been smitten into music by the
kisses that but made them bleed,
You had walked with Bice and the angels on
that verdant and enamelled mead.

I had trod the road which Dante treading saw
the suns of seven circles shine,
Ay! perchance had seen the heavens opening, as
they opened to the Florentine.

And the mighty nations would have crowned me,
who am crownless now and without name,
And some orient dawn had found me kneeling
on the threshold of the House of Fame.

I had sat within that marble circle where the
oldest bard is as the young,
And the pipe is ever dropping honey, and the
lyre's strings are ever strung.

Keats had lifted up his hymeneal curls from out
the poppy-seeded wine,
With ambrosial mouth had kissed my forehead,
clasped the hand of noble love in mine.

And at springtime, when the apple-blossoms
brush the burnished bosom of the dove,
Two young lovers lying in an orchard would
have read the story of our love.

Would have read the legend of my passion,
known the bitter secret of my heart,
Kissed as we have kissed, but never parted as
we two are fated now to part.

For the crimson flower of our life is eaten by
the canker-worm of truth,
And no hand can gather up the fallen withered
petals of the rose of youth.

Yet I am not sorry that I loved you—ah! what
else had I a boy to do,—
For the hungry teeth of time devour, and the
silent-footed years pursue.

Rudderless, we drift athwart a tempest, and
when once the storm of youth is past,
Without lyre, without lute or chorus, Death a
silent pilot comes at last.

And within the grave there is no pleasure, for
the blind-worm battens on the root,
And Desire shudders into ashes, and the tree of
Passion bears no fruit.

Ah! what else had I to do but love you, God's
own mother was less dear to me,
And less dear the Cytheræan rising like an
argent lily from the sea.

I have made my choice, have lived my poems,
and, though youth is gone in wasted days,
I have found the lover's crown of myrtle
better than the poet's crown of bays.

The Ballad of Reading Gaol

In Memoriam

C. T. W.

SOMETIME TROOPER OF THE ROYAL HORSE GUARDS

OBIIT H. M. PRISON, READING, BERKSHIRE

JULY 7, 1896

THE BALLAD OF READING GAOL.

I.

He did not wear his scarlet coat,
For blood and wine are red,
And blood and wine were on his hands
When they found him with the dead,
The poor dead woman whom he loved,
And murdered in her bed.

He walked amongst the Trial Men
In a suit of shabby gray;
A cricket cap was on his head,
And his step seemed light and gay;
But I never saw a man who looked
So wistfully at the day.

I never saw a man who looked
With such a wistful eye
Upon that little tent of blue

Which prisoners call the sky,
And at every drifting cloud that went
With sails of silver by.

I walked, with other souls in pain,
Within another ring,
And was wondering if the man had done
A great or little thing,
When a voice behind me whispered low,
"That fellow's got to swing."

Dear Christ! the very prison walls
Suddenly seemed to reel,
And the sky above my head became
Like a casque of scorching steel;
And, though I was a soul in pain,
My pain I could not feel.

I only knew what haunted thought
Quickened his step, and why
He looked upon the garish day
With such a wistful eye;
The man had killed the thing he loved,
And so he had to die.

Yet each man kills the thing he loves,
By each let this be heard,
Some do it with a bitter look,
Some with a flattering word,
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword!

Some kill their love when they are young,
And some when they are old;
Some strangle with the hands of Lust,
Some with the hands of Gold:
The kindest use a knife, because
The dead so soon grow cold.

Some love too little, some too long,
Some sell, and others buy;
Some do the deed with many tears,
And some without a sigh:
For each man kills the thing he loves,
Yet each man does not die.

* * *

He does not die a death of shame
On a day of dark disgrace,
Nor have a noose about his neck,

Nor a cloth upon his face,
Nor drop feet foremost through the floor
Into an empty space.

He does not sit with silent men
Who watch him night and day;
Who watch him when he tries to weep,
And when he tries to pray;
Who watch him lest himself should rob
The prison of its prey.

He does not wake at dawn to see
Dread figures throng his room,
The shivering Chaplain robed in white,
The Sheriff stern with gloom,
And the Governor all in shiny black,
With the yellow face of Doom.

He does not rise in piteous haste
To put on convict-clothes,
While some coarse-mouthed Doctor gloats, and notes
Each new and nerve-twitched pose,
Fingering a watch whose little ticks
Are like horrible hammer-blows.

He does not feel that sickening thirst
  That sands one's throat, before
The hangman with his gardener's gloves
  Comes through the padded door,
And binds one with three leathern thongs,
  That the throat may thirst no more.

He does not bend his head to hear
  The Burial Office read,
Nor, while the anguish of his soul
  Tells him he is not dead,
Cross his own coffin, as he moves
  Into the hideous shed.

He does not stare upon the air
  Through a little roof of glass:
He does not pray with lips of clay
  For his agony to pass;
Nor feel upon his shuddering cheek
  The kiss of Caiaphas.

II.

Six weeks the guardsman walked the yard,
In the suit of shabby gray:
His cricket cap was on his head,
And his step was light and gay,
But I never saw a man who looked
So wistfully at the day.

I never saw a man who looked
With such a wistful eye
Upon that little tent of blue
Which prisoners call the sky,
And at every wandering cloud that trailed
Its ravelled fleeces by.

He did not wring his hands, as do
Those witless men who dare
To try to rear the changeling Hope
In the cave of black Despair:
He only looked upon the sun,
And drank the morning air.

He did not wring his hands nor weep,
  Nor did he peek or pine,
But he drank the air as though it held
  Some healthful anodyne;
With open mouth he drank the sun
  As though it had been wine!

And I and all the souls in pain,
  Who tramped the other ring,
Forgot if we ourselves had done
  A great or little thing,
And watched with gaze of dull amaze
  The man who had to swing.

For strange it was to see him pass
  With a step so light and gay,
And strange it was to see him look
  So wistfully at the day,
And strange it was to think that he
  Had such a debt to pay.

* * *

The oak and elm have pleasant leaves
  That in the spring-time shoot:
But grim to see is the gallows-tree,

With its adder-bitten root,
And, green or dry, a man must die
Before it bears its fruit!

The loftiest place is the seat of grace
For which all worldlings try:
But who would stand in hempen band
Upon a scaffold high,
And through a murderer's collar take
His last look at the sky?

It is sweet to dance to violins
When Love and Life are fair:
To dance to flutes, to dance to lutes
Is delicate and rare:
But it is not sweet with nimble feet
To dance upon the air!

So with curious eyes and sick surmise
We watched him day by day,
And wondered if each one of us
Would end the self-same way,
For none can tell to what red Hell
His sightless soul may stray.

At last the dead man walked no more
  Amongst the Trial Men,
And I knew that he was standing up,
  In the black dock's dreadful pen,
And that never would I see his face
  For weal or woe again.

Like two doomed ships that pass in storm
  We had crossed each other's way:
But we made no sign, we said no word,
  We had no word to say;
For we did not meet in the holy night,
  But in the shameful day.

A prison wall was round us both,
  Two outcast men we were:
The world had thrust us from its heart,
  And God from out His care:
And the iron gin that waits for Sin
  Had caught us in its snare.

III.

In Debtors' Yard the stones are hard,
And the dripping wall is high,
So it was there he took the air
Beneath the leaden sky,
And by each side a warder walked,
For fear the man might die.

Or else he sat with those who watched
His anguish night and day;
Who watched him when he rose to weep,
And when he crouched to pray;
Who watched him lest himself should rob
Their scaffold of its prey.

The Governor was strong upon
The Regulations Act:
The Doctor said that Death was but
A scientific fact:
And twice a day the Chaplain called,
And left a little tract.

And twice a day he smoked his pipe,
  And drank his quart of beer:
His soul was resolute, and held
  No hiding-place for fear;
He often said that he was glad
  The hangman's day was near.

But why he said so strange a thing
  No warder dared to ask:
For he to whom a watcher's doom
  Is given as his task,
Must set a lock upon his lips,
  And make his face a mask.

Or else he might be moved, and try
  To comfort or console:
And what should Human Pity do
  Pent up in Murderers' Hole?
What word of grace in such a place
  Could help a brother's soul?

* * *

With slouch and swing around the ring
  We trod the Fools' Parade!
We did not care: we knew we were

The Devil's Own Brigade:
And shaven head and feet of lead
Make a merry masquerade.

We tore the tarry rope to shreds
With blunt and bleeding nails;
We rubbed the doors, and scrubbed the floors,
And cleaned the shining rails:
And, rank by rank, we soaped the plank,
And clattered with the pails.

We sewed the sacks, we broke the stones,
We turned the dusty drill:
We banged the tins, and bawled the hymns,
And sweated on the mill:
But in the heart of every man
Terror was lying still.

So still it lay that every day
Crawled like a weed-clogged wave:
And we forgot the bitter lot
That waits for fool and knave,
Till once, as we tramped in from work,
We passed an open grave.

With yawning mouth the horrid hole
  Gaped for a living thing;
The very mud cried out for blood
  To the thirsty asphalt ring:
And we knew that ere one dawn grew fair
  The fellow had to swing.

Right in we went, with soul intent
  On Death and Dread and Doom:
The hangman, with his little bag,
  Went shuffling through the gloom:
And I trembled as I groped my way
  Into my numbered tomb.

* * *

That night the empty corridors
  Were full of forms of Fear,
And up and down the iron town
  Stole feet we could not hear,
And through the bars that hide the stars
  White faces seemed to peer.

He lay as one who lies and dreams
  In a pleasant meadow-land,
The watchers watched him as he slept,
  And could not understand
How one could sleep so sweet a sleep
  With a hangman close at hand.

But there is no sleep when men must weep
  Who never yet have wept:
So we—the fool, the fraud, the knave—
  That endless vigil kept,
And through each brain on hands of pain
  Another's terror crept.

* * *

Alas! it is a fearful thing
  To feel another's guilt!
For, right within, the sword of Sin
  Pierced to its poisoned hilt,
And as molten lead were the tears we shed
  For the blood we had not spilt.

The warders with their shoes of felt
  Crept by each padlocked door,
And peeped and saw, with eyes of awe,
  Gray figures on the floor,

And wondered why men knelt to pray
  Who never prayed before.

All through the night we knelt and prayed,
  Mad mourners of a corse!
The troubled plumes of midnight shook
  Like the plumes upon a hearse:
And as bitter wine upon a sponge
  Was the savour of Remorse.

* * *

The gray cock crew, the red cock crew,
  But never came the day:
And crooked shapes of Terror crouched,
  In the corners where we lay:
And each evil sprite that walks by night
  Before us seemed to play.

They glided past, they glided fast,
  Like travellers through a mist:
They mocked the moon in a rigadoon
  Of delicate turn and twist,

And with formal pace and loathsome grace
The phantoms kept their tryst.

With mop and mow, we saw them go,
Slim shadows hand in hand:
About, about, in ghostly rout
They trod a saraband:
And the damned grotesques made arabesques,
Like the wind upon the sand!

With the pirouettes of marionettes,
They tripped on pointed tread:
But with flutes of Fear they filled the ear,
As their grisly masque they led,
And loud they sang, and long they sang,
For they sang to wake the dead.

"Oho!" they cried, *"The world is wide,*
But fettered limbs go lame!
And once, or twice, to throw the dice
Is a gentlemanly game,
But he does not win who plays with Sin
In the secret House of Shame."

No things of air these antics were,
That frolicked with such glee:
To men whose lives were held in gyves,
And whose feet might not go free,
Ah! wounds of Christ! they were living things,
Most terrible to see.

Around, around, they waltzed and wound;
Some wheeled in smirking pairs;
With the mincing step of a demirep
Some sidled up the stairs:
And with subtle sneer, and fawning leer,
Each helped us at our prayers.

* * *

The morning wind began to moan,
But still the night went on:
Through its giant loom the web of gloom
Crept till each thread was spun:
And, as we prayed, we grew afraid
Of the Justice of the Sun.

The moaning wind went wandering round
  The weeping prison wall:
Till like a wheel of turning steel
  We felt the minutes crawl:
O moaning wind! what had we done
  To have such a seneschal?

At last I saw the shadowed bars,
  Like a lattice wrought in lead,
Move right across the whitewashed wall
  That faced my three-plank bed,
And I knew that somewhere in the world
  God's dreadful dawn was red.

* *
*

At six o'clock we cleaned our cells,
  At seven all was still,
But the sough and swing of a mighty wing
  The prison seemed to fill,
For the Lord of Death with icy breath
  Had entered in to kill.

He did not pass in purple pomp,
  Nor ride a moon-white steed.
Three yards of cord and a sliding board
  Are all the gallows' need:
So with rope of shame the Herald came
  To do the secret deed.

* *
*

We were as men who through a fen
  Of filthy darkness grope:
We did not dare to breathe a prayer
  Or to give our anguish scope:
Something was dead in each of us,
  And what was dead was Hope.

For Man's grim Justice goes its way,
  And will not swerve aside:
It slays the weak, it slays the strong,
  It has a deadly stride:
With iron heel it slays the strong
  The monstrous parricide!

We waited for the stroke of eight:
  Each tongue was thick with thirst:
For the stroke of eight is the stroke of Fate
  That makes a man accursed,
And Fate will use a running noose
  For the best man and the worst.

We had no other thing to do,
  Save to wait for the sign to come:
So, like things of stone in a valley lone,
  Quiet we sat and dumb:
But each man's heart beat thick and quick,
  Like a madman on a drum!

* * *

With sudden shock the prison-clock
  Smote on the shivering air,
And from all the gaol rose up a wail
  Of impotent despair,
Like the sound the frightened marshes hear
  From some leper in his lair.

And as one sees most fearful things
In the crystal of a dream,
We saw the greasy hempen rope
Hooked to the blackened beam,
And heard the prayer the hangman's snare
Strangled into a scream.

And all the woe that moved him so
That he gave that bitter cry,
And the wild regrets, and the bloody sweats,
None knew so well as I:
For he who lives more lives than one
More deaths than one must die.

IV.

There is no chapel on the day
  On which they hang a man:
The Chaplain's heart is far too sick,
  Or his face is far too wan,
Or there is that written in his eyes
  Which none should look upon.

So they kept us close till nigh on noon,
  And then they rang the bell,
And the warders with their jingling keys
  Opened each listening cell,
And down the iron stair we tramped,
  Each from his separate Hell.

Out into God's sweet air we went,
  But not in wonted way,
For this man's face was white with fear,
  And that man's face was gray,
And I never saw sad men who looked
  So wistfully at the day.

I never saw sad men who looked
  With such a wistful eye
Upon that little tent of blue
  We prisoners called the sky,
And at every happy cloud that passed
  In such strange freedom by.

But there were those amongst us all
  Who walked with downcast head,
And knew that, had each got his due,
  They should have died instead:
He had but killed a thing that lived,
  Whilst they had killed the dead.

For he who sins a second time
  Wakes a dead soul to pain,
And draws it from its spotted shroud,
  And makes it bleed again,
And makes it bleed great gouts of blood,
  And makes it bleed in vain!

* *
*

Like ape or clown, in monstrous garb
  With crooked arrows starred,
Silently we went round and round

The slippery asphalt yard;
Silently we went round and round,
And no man spoke a word.

Silently we went round and round,
And through each hollow mind
The Memory of dreadful things
Rushed like a dreadful wind,
And Horror stalked before each man,
And Terror crept behind.

* *
*

The warders strutted up and down,
And watched their herd of brutes,
Their uniforms were spick and span,
And they wore their Sunday suits,
But we knew the work they had been at,
By the quicklime on their boots.

For where a grave had opened wide,
There was no grave at all:
Only a stretch of mud and sand
By the hideous prison-wall,
And a little heap of burning lime,
That the man should have his pall.

For he has a pall, this wretched man,
Such as few men can claim:
Deep down below a prison-yard,
Naked for greater shame,
He lies, with fetters on each foot,
Wrapt in a sheet of flame!

And all the while the burning lime
Eats flesh and bone away,
It eats the brittle bone by night,
And the soft flesh by day,
It eats the flesh and bone by turns,
But it eats the heart alway.

* * *

For three long years they will not sow
Or root or seedling there:
For three long years the unblessed spot
Will sterile be and bare,
And look upon the wondering sky
With unreproachful stare.

They think a murderer's heart would taint
  Each simple seed they sow.
It is not true! God's kindly earth
  Is kindlier than men know,
And the red rose would but glow more red,
  The white rose whiter blow.

Out of his mouth a red, red rose!
  Out of his heart a white!
For who can say by what strange way,
  Christ brings His will to light,
Since the barren staff the pilgrim bore
  Bloomed in the great Pope's sight?

* *
  *

But neither milk-white rose nor red
  May bloom in prison air;
The shard, the pebble, and the flint,
  Are what they give us there:
For flowers have been known to heal
  A common man's despair.

So never will wine-red rose or white,
  Petal by petal, fall
On that stretch of mud and sand that lies
  By the hideous prison-wall,
To tell the men who tramp the yard
  That God's Son died for all.

* *
*

Yet though the hideous prison-wall
  Still hems him round and round,
And a spirit may not walk by night
  That is with fetters bound,
And a spirit may but weep that lies
  In such unholy ground,

He is at peace—this wretched man—
  At peace, or will be soon:
There is no thing to make him mad,
  Nor does Terror walk at noon,
For the lampless Earth in which he lies
  Has neither Sun nor Moon.

They hanged him as a beast is hanged:
  They did not even toll
A requiem that might have brought

Rest to his startled soul,
But hurriedly they took him out,
And hid him in a hole.

The warders stripped him of his clothes,
And gave him to the flies:
They mocked the swollen purple throat,
And the stark and staring eyes:
And with laughter loud they heaped the shroud
In which the convict lies.

The Chaplain would not kneel to pray
By his dishonoured grave:
Nor mark it with that blessed Cross
That Christ for sinners gave,
Because the man was one of those
Whom Christ came down to save.

Yet all is well; he has but passed
To Life's appointed bourne:
And alien tears will fill for him
Pity's long-broken urn,
For his mourners will be outcast men,
And outcasts always mourn.

V.

I know not whether Laws be right,
Or whether Laws be wrong;
All that we know who lie in gaol
Is that the wall is strong;
And that each day is like a year,
A year whose days are long.

But this I know, that every Law
That men have made for Man,
Since first Man took his brother's life,
And the sad world began,
But straws the wheat and saves the chaff
With a most evil fan.

This too I know—and wise it were
If each could know the same—
That every prison that men build
Is built with bricks of shame,
And bound with bars lest Christ should see
How men their brothers maim.

With bars they blur the gracious moon,
  And blind the goodly sun:
And they do well to hide their Hell,
  For in it things are done
That Son of God nor son of Man
  Ever should look upon!

* * *

The vilest deeds like poison weeds
  Bloom well in prison-air:
It is only what is good in Man
  That wastes and withers there:
Pale Anguish keeps the heavy gate,
  And the Warder is Despair.

For they starve the little frightened child
  Till it weeps both night and day:
And they scourge the weak, and flog the fool,
  And gibe the old and gray,
And some grow mad, and all grow bad,
  And none a word may say.

Each narrow cell in which we dwell
  Is a foul and dark latrine,
And the fetid breath of living Death
  Chokes up each grated screen,
And all, but Lust, is turned to dust
  In Humanity's machine.

The brackish water that we drink
  Creeps with a loathsome slime,
And the bitter bread they weigh in scales
  Is full of chalk and lime,
And Sleep will not lie down, but walks
  Wild-eyed, and cries to Time.

* *
*

But though lean Hunger and green Thirst
  Like asp with adder fight,
We have little care of prison fare,
  For what chills and kills outright
Is that every stone one lifts by day
  Becomes one's heart by night.

With midnight always in one's heart,
And twilight in one's cell,
We turn the crank, or tear the rope,
Each in his separate Hell,
And the silence is more awful far
Than the sound of a brazen bell.

And never a human voice comes near
To speak a gentle word:
And the eye that watches through the door
Is pitiless and hard:
And by all forgot, we rot and rot,
With soul and body marred.

And thus we rust Life's iron chain
Degraded and alone:
And some men curse, and some men weep,
And some men make no moan:
But God's eternal Laws are kind
And break the heart of stone.

And every human heart that breaks,
In prison-cell or yard,
Is as that broken box that gave

Its treasure to the Lord,
And filled the unclean leper's house
With the scent of costliest nard.

Ah! happy they whose hearts can break
And peace of pardon win!
How else may man make straight his plan
And cleanse his soul from Sin?
How else but through a broken heart
May Lord Christ enter in?

* * *

And he of the swollen purple throat,
And the stark and staring eyes,
Waits for the holy hands that took
The Thief to Paradise;
And a broken and a contrite heart
The Lord will not despise.

The man in red who reads the Law
Gave him three weeks of life,
Three little weeks in which to heal

His soul of his soul's strife,
And cleanse from every blot of blood
The hand that held the knife.

And with tears of blood he cleansed the hand,
The hand that held the steel:
For only blood can wipe out blood,
And only tears can heal:
And the crimson stain that was of Cain
Became Christ's snow-white seal.

VI.

In Reading gaol by Reading town
  There is a pit of shame,
And in it lies a wretched man
  Eaten by teeth of flame,
In a burning winding-sheet he lies,
  And his grave has got no name.

And there, till Christ call forth the dead,
  In silence let him lie:
No need to waste the foolish tear,
  Or heave the windy sigh:
The man had killed the thing he loved,
  And so he had to die.

And all men kill the thing they love,
  By all let this be heard,
Some do it with a bitter look,
  Some with a flattering word,
The coward does it with a kiss,
  The brave man with a sword!

C. 3. 3.

The Sphinx

To
MARCEL SCHWOB
IN FRIENDSHIP
AND
IN ADMIRATION

THE SPHINX.

In a dim corner of my room,
for longer than my fancy thinks,

A beautiful and silent Sphinx
has watched me through the shifting
gloom.

Inviolate and immobile
she does not rise, she does not stir

For silver moons are nought to her,
and nought to her the suns that reel.

Red follows grey across the air
the waves of moonlight ebb and flow

But with the dawn she does not go
and in the night-time she is there.

Dawn follows Dawn, and Nights grow old
and all the while this curious cat

Lies crouching on the Chinese mat
with eyes of satin rimmed with gold.

Upon the mat she lies and leers,
and on the tawny throat of her

Flutters the soft and silky fur
or ripples to her pointed ears.

Come forth, my lovely seneschal,
so somnolent, so statuesque,

Come forth, you exquisite grotesque,
half woman and half animal,

Come forth, my lovely languorous Sphinx,
and put your head upon my knee

And let me stroke your throat and see
your body spotted like the Lynx,

And let me touch those curving claws
of yellow ivory, and grasp

The tail that like a monstrous Asp
coils round your heavy velvet paws.

A thousand weary centuries
are thine, while I have hardly seen

Some twenty summers cast their green
for Autumn's gaudy liveries,

But you can read the Hieroglyphs
on the great sandstone obelisks,

And you have talked with Basilisks
and you have looked on Hippogriffs

O tell me, were you standing by
when Isis to Osiris knelt,

And did you watch the Egyptian melt
her union for Antony,

And drink the jewel-drunken wine,
and bend her head in mimic awe

To see the huge pro-consul draw
the salted tunny from the brine?

And did you mark the Cyprian kiss
with Adon on his catafalque,

And did you follow Amanalk
the god of Heliopolis?

And did you talk with Thoth, and did
you hear the moon-horned Io weep,

And know the painted kings who sleep
beneath the wedge-shaped Pyramid?

Lift up your large black satin eyes
which are like cushions where one sinks,

Fawn at my feet, fantastic Sphinx,
and sing me all your memories.

Sing to me of the Jewish maid
who wandered with the Holy Child,

And how you led them through the wild,
and how they slept beneath your shade.

Sing to me of that odorous
green eve when crouching by the marge

You heard from Adrian's gilded barge
the laughter of Antinöus,

And lapped the stream, and fed your drouth,
and watched with hot and hungry stare

The ivory body of that rare
young slave with his pomegranate
mouth.

Sing to me of the Labyrinth
in which the two-formed bull was
stalled,

Sing to me of the night you crawled
across the temple's granite plinth

When through the purple corridors
the screaming scarlet Ibis flew

In terror, and a horrid dew
dripped from the moaning Mandra-
gores,

And the great torpid crocodile
within the tank shed slimy tears,

And tore the jewels from his ears
and staggered back into the Nile,

And the Priests cursed you with shrill psalms
as in your claws you seized their snake

And crept away with it to slake
your passion by the shuddering palms.

Who were your lovers, who were they
who wrestled for you in the dust?

Which was the vessel of your Lust,
what Leman had you every day?

Did giant lizards come and crouch
before you on the reedy banks?

Did Gryphons with great metal flanks
leap on you in your trampled couch,

Did monstrous hippopotami
come sidling to you in the mist

Did gilt-scaled dragons writhe and twist
with passion as you passed them by?

And from the brick-built Lycian tomb
what horrible Chimæra came

With fearful heads and fearful flame
to breed new wonders from your womb?

* * * * *

Or had you shameful secret guests
and did you harry to your home

Some Nereid coiled in amber foam
with curious rock-crystal breasts;

Or did you, treading through the froth,
call to the brown Sidonian

For tidings of Leviathan,
Leviathan or Behemoth?

Or did you when the sun was set,
climb up the cactus-covered slope

To meet your swarthy Ethiop
whose body was of polished jet?

Or did you while the earthen skiffs
dropt down the gray Nilotic flats

At twilight, and the flickering bats
flew round the temple's triple glyphs

Steal to the border of the bar
and swim across the silent lake

And slink into the vault and make
the Pyramid your lupanar,

Till from each black sarcophagus
rose up the painted, swathéd dead,

Or did you lure unto your bed
the ivory-horned Trageophos?

Or did you love the God of flies
who plagued the Hebrews and was
splashed

With wine unto the waist, or Pasht
who had green beryls for her eyes?

Or that young God, the Tyrian,
who was more amorous than the dove

Of Ashtaroth, or did you love
the God of the Assyrian,

Whose wings that like transparent talc
rose high above his hawk-faced head

Painted with silver and with red
and ribbed with rods of Oreichalch?

Or did huge Apis from his car
leap down and lay before your feet

Big blossoms of the honey-sweet,
and honey-coloured nenuphar?

* * * * *

How subtle secret is your smile;
did you love none then? Nay I know

Great Ammon was your bedfellow,
he lay with you beside the Nile.

The river-horses in the slime
trumpeted when they saw him come

Odorous with Syrian galbanum
and smeared with spikenard and with
thyme.

He came along the river bank
like some tall galley argent-sailed

He strode across the waters, mailed
in beauty and the waters sank.

He strode across the desert sand,
he reached the valley where you lay,

He waited till the dawn of day,
then touched your black breasts with his hand.

You kissed his mouth with mouth of flame,
you made the hornéd-god your own,

You stood behind him on his throne;
you called him by his secret name,

You whispered monstrous oracles
into the caverns of his ears,

With blood of goats and blood of steers
you taught him monstrous miracles,

While Ammon was your bedfellow
your chamber was the steaming Nile

And with your curved Archaic smile
you watched his passion come and go.

With Syrian oils his brows were bright
and wide-spread as a tent at noon

His marble limbs made pale the moon
and lent the day a larger light,

His long hair was nine cubits span
and coloured like that yellow gem

Which, hidden in their garments' hem,
the merchants bring from Kurdistan.

His face was as the must that lies
upon a vat of new-made wine,

The seas could not insapphirine
the perfect azure of his eyes.

His thick, soft throat was white as milk
and threaded with thin veins of blue

And curious pearls like frozen dew
were broidered on his flowing silk.

* * * * *

On pearl and porphyry pedestalled
he was too bright to look upon

For on his ivory breast there shone
the wondrous ocean-emerald,—

That mystic, moonlight jewel which
some diver of the Colchian caves

Had found beneath the blackening waves
and carried to the Colchian witch.

Before his gilded galiot
ran naked vine-wreathed corybants

And lines of swaying elephants
knelt down to draw his chariot,

And lines of swarthy Nubians
bore up his litter as he rode

Down the great granite-paven road,
between the nodding peacock fans.

The merchants brought him steatite
from Sidon in their painted ships;

The meanest cup that touched his lips
was fashioned from a chrysolite.

The merchants brought him cedar chests
of rich apparel, bound with cords;

His train was borne by Memphian lords;
young kings were glad to be his guests.

Ten hundred shaven priests did bow
to Ammon's altar day and night,

Ten hundred lamps did wave their light
through Ammon's carven house,—and
now

Foul snake and speckled adder with
their young ones crawl from stone to
stone

For ruined is the house, and prone
the great rose-marble monolith;

Wild ass or strolling jackal comes
and crouches in the mouldering gates,

Wild satyrs call unto their mates
across the fallen fluted drums.

And on the summit of the pile,
the blue-faced ape of Horus sits

And gibbers while the fig-tree splits
the pillars of the peristyle.

* * * * *

The God is scattered here and there;
deep hidden in the windy sand

I saw his giant granite hand
still clenched in impotent despair.

And many a wandering caravan
of stately negroes, silken-shawled,

Crossing the desert, halts appalled
before the neck that none can span.

And many a bearded Bedouin
draws back his yellow-striped burnous

To gaze upon the Titan thews
of him who was thy paladin.

* * * * *

Go seek his fragments on the moor,
and wash them in the evening dew,

And from their pieces make anew
thy mutilated paramour!

Go seek them where they lie alone
and from their broken pieces make

Thy bruisèd bedfellow! And wake
mad passions in the senseless stone!

Charm his dull ear with Syrian hymns;
he loved your body: oh be kind!

Pour spikenard on his hair and wind
soft rolls of linen round his limbs;

Wind round his head the figured coins,
stain with red fruits the pallid lips;

Weave purple for his shrunken hips,
and purple for his barren loins!

Away to Egypt! Have no fear;
only one God has ever died,

Only one God has let His side
be wounded by a soldier's spear.

But these, thy lovers, are not dead;
still by the hundred-cubit gate

Dog-faced Anubis sits in state
with lotus lilies for thy head.

Still from his chair of porphyry
giant Memnon strains his lidless eyes

Across the empty land and cries
each yellow morning unto thee.

And Nilus with his broken horn
lies in his black and oozy bed

And till thy coming will not spread
his waters on the withering corn.

Your lovers are not dead, I know,
and will rise up and hear thy voice

And clash their symbols and rejoice
and run to kiss your mouth,—and so

Set wings upon your argosies!
Set horses to your ebon car!

Back to your Nile! Or if you are
grown sick of dead divinities;

Follow some roving lion's spoor
across the copper-coloured plain,

Reach out and hale him by the mane
and bid him be your paramour!

Couch by his side upon the grass
and set your white teeth in his throat,

And when you hear his dying note,
lash your long flanks of polished brass

And take a tiger for your mate,
whose amber sides are flecked with
black,

And ride upon his gilded back
in triumph through the Theban gate,

And toy with him in amorous jests,
and when he turns and snarls and
gnaws,

Oh smite him with your jasper claws
and bruise him with your agate breasts!

* * * * *

Why are you tarrying? Get hence!
I weary of your sullen ways.

I weary of your steadfast gaze,
your somnolent magnificence.

Your horrible and heavy breath
makes the light flicker in the lamp,

And on my brow I feel the damp
and dreadful dews of night and death.

Your eyes are like fantastic moons
that shiver in some stagnant lake,

Your tongue is like a scarlet snake
that dances to fantastic tunes.

Your pulse makes poisonous melodies,
and your black throat is like the hole

Left by some torch or burning coal
on Saracenic tapestries.

Away! The sulphur-coloured stars
are hurrying through the Western gate!

Away! Or it may be too late
to climb their silent silver cars!

See, the dawn shivers round the gray,
gilt-dialled towers, and the rain

Streams down each diamonded pane
and blurs with tears the wannish day.

What snake-tressed fury, fresh from Hell,
with uncouth gestures and unclean,

Stole from the poppy-drowsy queen
and led you to a student's cell?

What songless, tongueless ghost of sin
crept through the curtains of the night

And saw my taper burning bright,
and knocked and bade you enter in?

Are there not others more accursed,
whiter with leprosies than I?

Are Abana and Pharphar dry,
that you come here to slake your thirst?

* * * * *

False Sphinx! False Sphinx! By reedy Styx,
old Charon, leaning on his oar,

Waits for my coin. Go thou before
and leave me to my crucifix,

Whose pallid burden, sick with pain,
watches the world with wearied eyes.

And weeps for every soul that dies,
and weeps for every soul in vain!!

* * * * *

Uncollected Poems

THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE.

. . . ἀναγκαίως δ' ἔχει
βίον θερίζειν κάρπιμον στάχυν,
καὶ τὸν εἶναι τον δὲ μή.

Thou knowest all—I seek in vain
What lands to till or sow with seed—
The land is black with briar and weed,
Nor cares for falling tears or rain.

Thou knowest all—I sit and wait
With blinded eyes and hands that fail,
Till the last lifting of the veil,
And the first opening of the gate.

Thou knowest all—I cannot see.
I trust I shall not live in vain,
I know that we shall meet again,
In some divine eternity.

From "The Irish Monthly,"
September, 1876.

A LAMENT.

Αἴλινον, αἴλινον εἰπὲ,
Τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω.

O well for him who lives at ease
With garnered gold in wide domain,
Nor heeds the plashing of the rain,
The crashing down of forest trees.

O well for him who ne'er hath known
The travail of the hungry years,
A father grey with grief and tears,
A mother weeping all alone.

But well for him whose feet hath trod
The weary road of toil and strife,
Yet from the sorrows of his life
Builds ladders to be nearer God.

S.M. Magdalen College,
Oxford.

WASTED DAYS.

A fair slim boy not made for this world's pain,
With hair of gold thick clustering round his ears,
And longing eyes half veiled by foolish tears
Like bluest water seen through mists of rain:
Pale cheeks whereon no kiss hath left its stain,
Red under lip drawn for fear of Love,
And white throat whiter than the breast of dove.
Alas! alas! if all should be in vain.

Behind, wide fields, and reapers all a-row
In heat and labour toiling wearily,
To no sweet sound of laughter or of lute.
The sun is shooting wide its crimson glow,

Still the boy dreams: nor knows that night is
nigh,
And in the night-time no man gathers fruit.

From Kottobos, Trinity College,
Dublin, 1877.

LOTUS LEAVES.

I.

There is no peace beneath the moon,—
  Ah! in those meadows is there peace
  Where, girdled with a silver fleece,
As a bright shepherd, strays the moon?

Queen of the gardens of the sky,
  Where stars like lilies, white and fair,
  Shine through the mists of frosty air,
Oh, tarry, for the dawn is nigh!

Oh, tarry, for the envious day
  Stretches long hands to catch thy feet.
  Alas! but thou art overfleet,
Alas! I know thou wilt not stay.

II.

Eastward the dawn has broken red,
  The circling mists and shadows flee;
  Aurora rises from the sea,
And leaves the crocus-flowered bed.

Eastward the silver arrows fall,
  Splintering the veil of holy night:
  And a long wave of yellow light
Breaks silently on tower and hall.

And speeding wide across the wold
  Wakes into flight some fluttering bird;
  And all the chestnut tops are stirred,
And all the branches streaked with gold.

III.

To outer senses there is peace,
  A dream-like peace on either hand,
  Deep silence in the shadowy land,
Deep silence where the shadows cease,

Save for a cry that echoes shrill
From some lone bird disconsolate;
A curlew calling to its mate;
The answer from the distant hill.

And, herald of my love to Him
Who, waiting for the dawn, doth lie,
The orbèd maiden leaves the sky,
And the white firs grow more dim.

IV.

Up sprang the sun to run his race,
The breeze blew fair on meadow and lea,
But in the west I seemed to see
The likeness of a human face.

A linnet on the hawthorn spray
Sang of the glories of the spring,
And made the flow'ring copses ring
With gladness for the new-born day.

A lark from out the grass I trod
Flew wildly, and was lost to view.
In the great seamless veil of blue
That hangs before the face of God.

The willow whispered overhead
  That death is but a newer life
  And that with idle words of strife
We bring dishonour on the dead.

I took a branch from off the tree,
  And hawthorn branches drenched with dew,
  I bound them with a sprig of yew,
And made a garland fair to see.

I laid the flowers where He lies
  (Warm leaves and flowers on the stones):
  What joy I had to sit alone
Till evening broke on tired eyes:

Till all the shifting clouds had spun
  A robe of gold for God to wear
  And into seas of purple air
Sank the bright galley of the sun.

V.

Shall I be gladdened for the day,
  And let my inner heart be stirred
  By murmuring tree or song of bird,
And sorrow at the wild winds' play?

Not so, such idle dreams belong
To souls of lesser depth than mine;
I feel that I am half divine;
I know that I am great and strong.

I know that every forest tree
By labour rises from the root
I know that none shall gather fruit
By sailing on the barren sea.

Irish Monthly, 1877.

IMPRESSIONS.

I.

LE JARDIN.

The lily's withered chalice falls
  Around its rod of dusty gold,
  And from the beech trees on the wold
The last wood-pigeon coos and calls.

The gaudy leonine sunflower
  Hangs black and barren on its stalk,
  And down the windy garden walk
The dead leaves scatter,—hour by hour.

Pale privet-petals white as milk
  Are blown into a snowy mass;
  The roses lie upon the grass,
Like little shreds of crimson silk.

II.

La Mer.

A white mist drifts across the shrouds,
  A wild moon in this wintry sky
  Gleams like an angry lion's eye
Out of a mane of tawny clouds.

The muffled steersman at the wheel
  Is but a shadow in the gloom;—
  And in the throbbing engine room
Leap the long rods of polished steel.

The shattered storm has left its trace
  Upon this huge and heaving dome,
  For the thin threads of yellow foam
Float on the waves like ravelled lace.

Our Continent, Feb. 15, 1882.

UNDER THE BALCONY.

O beautiful star with the crimson mouth!
O moon with the brows of gold!
Rise up, rise up, from the odorous south!
And light for my love her way,
Lest her feet should stray
On the windy hill and the wold!
O beautiful star with the crimson mouth!
O moon with the brows of gold!

O ship that shakes on the desolate sea!
O ship with the wet, white sail!
Put in, put in, to the port to me!
For my love and I would go
To the land where the daffodils blow
In the heart of a violet dale!
O ship that shakes on the desolate sea!
O ship with the wet, white sail!

O rapturous bird with the low, sweet note!
O bird that sits on the spray!
Sing on, sing on, from your soft brown throat!
And my love in her little bed
Will listen, and lift her head
From the pillow, and come my way!
O rapturous bird with the low, sweet note!
O bird that sits on the spray!

O blossom that hangs in the tremulous air!
O blossom with lips of snow!
Come down, come down, for my love to wear!
You will die in her head in a crown,
You will die in a fold of her gown,
To her little light heart you will go!
O blossom that hangs in the tremulous air!
O blossom with lips of snow!

From the Shakespearean Show-Book,
Manchester, 1884.

A FRAGMENT.

[It is not generally known that the poem composed by Mr. Oscar Wilde for the Shakespearean Show Book was originally conceived as an address to Miss Terry on her departure from America. For reasons which we are not at liberty to divulge, it was deemed wiser to reconstruct it and give it in the form of a serenade to an indefinite object of worship. We have, however, been enabled to rescue two of the original stanzas, which will be read with much interest. Mr. Wilde's apostrophe to the "ship that shakes on the desolate sea" has been much criticised; but a little reflection will show us that the expression is eminently appropriate, referring, as it does, to the vibratory and very unpleasant motion of a screw steamship. The rescued stanzas run as follows:]

Beautiful star with the crimson lips
  And flagrant daffodil hair,
Come back, come back, in the shaking ships
    O'er the much-overrated sea,
    To the hearts that are sick for thee
  With a woe worse than mal de mer—
O beautiful star with the crimson lips
  And the flagrant daffodil hair.

O ship that shakes on the desolate sea,
Neath the flag of the wan White Star,
Thou bringest a brighter star with thee
From the land of the Philistine,
Where Niagara's reckoned fine
And Tupper is popular—
O ship that shakes on the desolate sea,
Neath the flag of the wan White Star.

From The Pall Mall Gazette, 1884.

LE JARDIN DES TUILERIES.

This winter air is keen and cold,
  And keen and cold this winter sun,
  But round my chair the children run
Like little things of dancing gold.

Sometimes about the painted kiosk
  The mimic soldiers strut and stride,
  Sometimes the blue-eyed brigands hide
In the bleak tangles of the bosk.

And sometimes, while the old nurse cons
  Her book, they steal across the square,
  And launch their paper navies where
Huge Triton writhes in greenish bronze.

And now in mimic flight they flee,
  And now they rush, a boisterous band—
  And, tiny hand on tiny hand,
Climb up the black and leafless tree.

Ah! cruel tree! if I were you,
And children climbed me, for their sake
Though it be winter I would break
Into spring blossoms white and blue!

From a Collection of Stories and Poems, entitled "In a Good Cause," published for the benefit of the North Eastern Hospital for Children, London, June 1885.

SONNET.

ON THE SALE BY AUCTION OF KEATS' LOVE LETTERS.

These are the letters which Endymion wrote
To one he loved in secret and apart,
And now the brawlers of the auction-mart
Bargain and bid for each tear-blotted note,
Aye! for each separate pulse of passion quote
The merchant's price! I think they love not art
Who break the crystal of a poet's heart,
That small and sickly eyes may glare or gloat.

Is it not said, that many years ago,
In a far Eastern town some soldiers ran
With torches through the midnight, and began
To wrangle for mean raiment, and to throw
Dice for the garments of a wretched man,
Not knowing the God's wonder, or His woe?

From "The Dramatic Review."
(London) 1886.

THE NEW REMORSE.

The sin was mine; I did not understand.
So now is music prisoned in her cave,
Save where some ebbing desultory wave
Frets with its restless whirls this meagre strand.
And in the withered hollow of this land
Hath Summer dug herself so deep a grave,
That hardly can the leaden willow crave
One silver blossom from keen Winter's hand.
But who is this that cometh by the shore?
(Nay, love, look up and wonder!) Who is this
Who cometh in dyed garments from the South?
It is thy new-found Lord, and he shall kiss
The yet unravished roses of thy mouth,
And I shall weep and worship, as before.

From "The Spirit Lamp," Oxford, Dec. 2, 1892.

AN INSCRIPTION.

IN A PRESENTATION COPY OF HIS BOOK, "A HOUSE OF POMEGRANATES," TO RICHARD LE GALLIENNE.

Go, little book,
To him who, on a lute with horns of pearl,
Sang of the white feet of the Golden Girl:
And bid him look
Into thy pages: it may hap that he
May find that golden maidens dance through thee.

From Book-Songs: An Anthology of Books and Bookmen from Modern Authors (London, 1893).

THE HARLOT'S HOUSE.

We caught the tread of dancing feet,
We loitered down the moonlit street,
And stopped beneath the Harlot's house.

Inside, above the din and fray,
We heard the loud musicians play
The "Treues Liebes," of Strauss.

Like strange mechanical grotesques,
Making fantastic arabesques,
The shadows raced across the blind.

We watched the ghostly dancers spin,
To sound of horn and violin,
Like black leaves wheeling in the wind.

Like wire-pulled Automatons,
Slim silhouetted skeletons
Went sidling through the slow quadrille,

Then took each other by the hand,
And danced a stately saraband;
Their laughter echoed thin and shrill.

Sometimes a clock-work puppet pressed
A phantom lover to her breast,
Sometimes they seemed to try and sing.

Sometimes a horrible Marionette
Came out, and smoked its cigarette
Upon the steps like a live thing.

Then turning to my love I said,
"The dead are dancing with the dead,
The dust is whirling with the dust."

But she, she heard the violin,
And left my side and entered in:
Love passed into the house of Lust.

Then suddenly the tune went false,
The dancers wearied of the waltz,
The shadows ceased to wheel and whirl,

And down the long and silent street,
The dawn with silver-sandalled feet,
Crept like a frightened girl.

PART II

THE HAPPY PRINCE
AND OTHER FAIRY TALES

TO
CARLOS BLACKER

THE HAPPY PRINCE.

High above the city, on a tall column, stood the statue of the Happy Prince. He was gilded all over with thin leaves of fine gold, for eyes he had two bright sapphires, and a large red ruby glowed on his sword-hilt.

He was very much admired indeed. "He is as beautiful as a weathercock," remarked one of the Town Councillors who wished to gain a reputation for having artistic tastes; "only not quite so useful," he added, fearing lest people should think him unpractical, which he really was not.

"Why can't you be like the Happy Prince?" asked a sensible mother of her little boy who was crying for the moon. "The Happy Prince never dreams of crying for anything."

"I am glad there is some one in the world who is quite happy," muttered a disappointed man as he gazed at the wonderful statue.

"He looks just like an angel," said the Char-

ity Children as they came out of the cathedral in their bright scarlet cloaks, and their clean white pinafores.

"How do you know?" said the Mathematical Master, "you have never seen one."

"Ah! but we have, in our dreams," answered the children; and the Mathematical Master frowned and looked very severe, for he did not approve of children dreaming.

One night there flew over the city a little Swallow. His friends had gone away to Egypt six weeks before, but he had stayed behind, for he was in love with the most beautiful Reed. He had met her early in the spring as he was flying down the river after a big yellow moth, and had been so attracted by her slender waist that he had stopped to talk to her.

"Shall I love you?" said the Swallow, who liked to come to the point at once, and the Reed made him a low bow. So he flew round and round her, touching the water with his wings, and making silver ripples. This was his courtship, and it lasted all through the summer.

"It is a ridiculous attachment," twittered the other Swallows, "she has no money, and far too many relations;" and indeed the river was

quite full of Reeds. Then, when the autumn came, they all flew away.

After they had gone he felt lonely, and began to tire of his lady-love. "She has no conversation," he said, "and I am afraid that she is a coquette, for she is always flirting with the wind." And certainly, whenever the wind blew, the Reed made the most graceful curtsies. "I admit that she is domestic," he continued, "but I love travelling, and my wife, consequently, should love travelling also."

"Will you come away with me?" he said finally to her; but the Reed shook her head, she was so attached to her home.

"You have been trifling with me," he cried. "I am off to the Pyramids. Good-bye!" and he flew away.

All day long he flew, and at night-time he arrived at the city. "Where shall I put up?" he said; "I hope the town has made preparations."

Then he saw the statue on the tall column. "I will put up there," he cried; "it is a fine position with plenty of fresh air." So he alighted just between the feet of the Happy Prince.

"I have a golden bedroom," he said softly to himself as he looked round, and he prepared to go to sleep; but just as he was putting his head under his wing a large drop of water fell on him. "What a curious thing!" he cried, "there is not a single cloud in the sky, the stars are quite clear and bright, and yet it is raining. The climate in the north of Europe is really dreadful. The Reed used to like the rain, but that was merely her selfishness."

Then another drop fell.

"What is the use of a statue if it cannot keep the rain off?" he said; "I must look for a good chimney-pot," and he determined to fly away.

But before he had opened his wings, a third drop fell, and he looked up, and saw—Ah! what did he see?

The eyes of the Happy Prince were filled with tears, and tears were running down his golden cheeks. His face was so beautiful in the moonlight that the little Swallow was filled with pity.

"Who are you?" he said.

"I am the Happy Prince."

"Why are you weeping then?" asked the Swallow; "you have quite drenched me."

"When I was alive and had a human heart,"

answered the statue, "I did not know what tears were, for I lived in the Palace of Sans Souci, where sorrow is not allowed to enter. In the daytime I played with my companions in the garden, and in the evening I led the dance in the Great Hall. Round the garden ran a very lofty wall, but I never cared to ask what lay beyond it, everything about me was so beautiful. My courtiers called me the Happy Prince, and happy indeed I was, if pleasure be happiness. So I lived, and so I died. And now that I am dead they have set me up here so high that I can see all the ugliness and all the misery of my city, and though my heart is made of lead yet I cannot choose but weep."

"What, is he not solid gold?" said the Swallow to himself. He was too polite to make any personal remarks out loud.

"Far away," continued the statue in a low musical voice, "far away in a little street there is a poor house. One of the windows is open, and through it I can see a woman seated at a table. Her face is thin and worn, and she has coarse red hands, all pricked by the needle, for she is a seamstress. She is embroidering passion-flowers on a satin gown for the loveliest of

the Queen's maids-of-honour to wear at the next Court-ball. In a bed in the corner of the room her little boy is lying ill. He has a fever, and is asking for oranges. His mother has nothing to give him but river water, so he is crying. Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow, will you not bring her the ruby out of my sword-hilt? My feet are fastened to this pedestal and I cannot move."

"I am waited for in Egypt," said the Swallow. "My friends are flying up and down the Nile, and talking to the large lotus-flowers. Soon they will be going to sleep in the tomb of the great King. The King is there himself in his painted coffin. He is wrapped in yellow linen, and embalmed with spices. Round his neck is a chain of pale green jade, and his hands are like withered leaves."

"Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow," said the Prince, "will you not stay with me for one night, and be my messenger? The boy is so thirsty, and the mother so sad."

"I don't think I like boys," answered the Swallow. "Last summer, when I was staying on the river, there were two rude boys, the miller's sons, who were always throwing stones

at me. They never hit me, of course; we swallows fly far too well for that, and besides, I come of a family famous for its agility; but still, it was a mark of disrespect."

But the Happy Prince looked so sad that the little Swallow was sorry. "It is very cold here," he said; "but I will stay with you for one night, and be your messenger."

"Thank you, little Swallow," said the Prince.

So the Swallow picked out the great ruby from the Prince's sword, and flew away with it in his beak over the roofs of the town.

He passed by the cathedral tower, where the white marble angels were sculptured. He passed by the palace and heard the sound of dancing. A beautiful girl came out on the balcony with her lover. "How wonderful the stars are," he said to her, "and how wonderful is the power of love!" "I hope my dress will be ready in time for the State-ball," she answered; "I have ordered passion-flowers to be embroidered on it; but the seamstresses are so lazy."

He passed over the river, and saw the lanterns hanging to the masts of the ships. He passed over the Ghetto, and saw the old Jews bargaining with each other, and weighing out money in

copper scales. At last he came to the poor house and looked in. The boy was tossing feverishly on his bed, and the mother had fallen asleep, she was so tired. In he hopped, and laid the great ruby on the table beside the woman's thimble. Then he flew gently round the bed, fanning the boy's forehead with his wings. "How cool I feel," said the boy, "I must be getting better;" and he sank into a delicious slumber.

Then the Swallow flew back to the Happy Prince and told him what he had done. "It is curious," he remarked, "but I feel quite warm now, although it is so cold."

"That is because you have done a good action," said the Prince. And the little Swallow began to think, and then he fell asleep. Thinking always made him sleepy.

When day broke he flew down to the river and had a bath. "What a remarkable phenomenon," said the Professor of Ornithology as he was passing over the bridge. "A swallow in winter!" And he wrote a long letter about it to the local newspaper. Every one quoted it, it was full of so many words that they could not understand.

"To-night I go to Egypt," said the Swallow, and he was in high spirits at the prospect. He visited all the public monuments, and sat a long time on top of the church steeple. Wherever he went the Sparrows chirruped, and said to each other, "What a distinguished stranger!" so he enjoyed himself very much.

When the moon rose he flew back to the Happy Prince. "Have you any commissions for Egypt?" he cried. "I am just starting."

"Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow," said the Prince, "will you not stay with me one night longer?"

"I am waited for in Egypt," answered the Swallow. "To-morrow my friends will fly up to the Second Cataract. The river-horse couches there among the bulrushes, and on a great granite throne sits the God Memnon. All night long he watches the stars, and when the morning star shines he utters one cry of joy, and then he is silent. At noon the yellow lions come down to the water's edge to drink. They have eyes like green beryls, and their roar is louder than the roar of the cataract."

"Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow," said the Prince, "far away across the city I see a young

man in a garret. He is leaning over a desk covered with papers, and in a tumbler by his side there is a bunch of withered violets. His hair is brown and crisp, and his lips are red as a pomegranate, and he has large and dreamy eyes. He is trying to finish a play for the Director of the Theatre, but he is too cold to write any more. There is no fire in the grate, and hunger has made him faint."

"I will wait with you one night longer," said the Swallow, who really had a good heart. "Shall I take him another ruby?"

"Alas! I have no ruby now," said the Prince; "my eyes are all that I have left. They are made of rare sapphires, which were brought out of India a thousand years ago. Pluck out one of them and take it to him. He will sell it to the jeweller, and buy food and firewood, and finish his play."

"Dear Prince," said the Swallow, "I cannot do that;" and he began to weep.

"Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow," said the Prince, "do as I command you."

So the Swallow plucked out the Prince's eye, and flew away to the student's garret. It was easy enough to get in, as there was a hole in

the roof. Through this he darted, and came into the room. The young man had his head buried in his hands, so he did not hear the flutter of the bird's wings, and when he looked up he found the beautiful sapphire lying on the withered violets.

"I am beginning to be appreciated," he cried; "this is from some great admirer. Now I can finish my play," and he looked quite happy.

The next day the Swallow flew down to the harbour. He sat on the mast of a large vessel and watched the sailors hauling big chests out of the hold with ropes. "Heave a-hoy!" they shouted as each chest came up. "I am going to Egypt!" cried the Swallow, but nobody minded, and when the moon rose he flew back to the Happy Prince.

"I am come to bid you good-bye," he cried.

"Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow," said the Prince, "will you not stay with me one night longer?"

"It is winter," answered the Swallow, "and the chill snow will soon be here. In Egypt the sun is warm on the green palm-trees, and the crocodiles lie in the mud and look lazily about them. My companions are building a nest in

the Temple of Baalbec, and the pink and white doves are watching them, and cooing to each other. Dear Prince, I must leave you, but I will never forget you, and next spring I will bring you back two beautiful jewels in place of those you have given away. The ruby shall be redder than a red rose, and the sapphire shall be as blue as the great sea."

"In the square below," said the Happy Prince, "there stands a little match-girl. She has let her matches fall in the gutter, and they are all spoiled. Her father will beat her if she does not bring home some money, and she is crying. She has no shoes or stockings, and her little head is bare. Pluck out my other eye, and give it to her, and her father will not beat her."

"I will stay with you one night longer," said the Swallow, "but I cannot pluck out your eye. You would be quite blind then."

"Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow," said the Prince, "do as I command you."

So he plucked out the Prince's other eye, and darted down with it. He swooped past the match-girl, and slipped the jewel into the palm of her hand. "What a lovely bit of glass," cried the little girl; and she ran home, laughing.

Then the Swallow came back to the Prince. "You are blind now," he said, "so I will stay with you always."

"No, little Swallow," said the poor Prince, "you must go away to Egypt."

"I will stay with you always," said the Swallow, and he slept at the Prince's feet.

All the next day he sat on the Prince's shoulder, and told him stories of what he had seen in strange lands. He told him of the red ibises, who stand in long rows on the banks of the Nile, and catch gold fish in their beaks; of the Sphinx, who is as old as the world itself, and lives in the desert, and knows everything; of the merchants, who walk slowly by the side of their camels, and carry amber beads in their hands; of the King of the Mountains of the Moon, who is as black as ebony, and worships a large crystal; of the great green snake that sleeps in a palm-tree, and has twenty priests to feed it with honey-cakes; and of the pygmies who sail over a big lake on large flat leaves, and are always at war with the butterflies.

"Dear little Swallow," said the Prince, "you tell me of marvellous things, but more marvellous than anything is the suffering of men and

of women. There is no Mystery so great as Misery. Fly over my city, little Swallow, and tell me what you see there."

So the Swallow flew over the great city, and saw the rich making merry in their beautiful houses, while the beggars were sitting at the gates. He flew into dark lanes, and saw the white faces of starving children looking out listlessly at the black streets. Under the archway of a bridge two little boys were lying in one another's arms to try and keep themselves warm. "How hungry we are!" they said. "You must not lie here," shouted the Watchman, and they wandered out into the rain.

Then he flew back and told the Prince what he had seen.

"I am covered with fine gold," said the Prince, "you must take it off, leaf by leaf, and give it to my poor; the living always think that gold can make them happy."

Leaf after leaf of the fine gold the Swallow picked off, till the Happy Prince looked quite dull and grey. Leaf after leaf of the fine gold he brought to the poor, and the children's faces grew rosier, and they laughed and played games

in the street. "We have bread now!" they cried.

Then the snow came, and after the snow came the frost. The streets looked as if they were made of silver, they were so bright and glistening; long icicles like crystal daggers hung down from the eaves of the houses, everybody went about in furs, and the little boys wore scarlet caps and skated on the ice.

The poor little Swallow grew colder and colder, but he would not leave the Prince, he loved him too well. He picked up crumbs outside the baker's door when the baker was not looking, and tried to keep himself warm by flapping his wings.

But at last he knew that he was going to die. He had just strength to fly up to the Prince's shoulder once more. "Good-bye, dear Prince!" he murmured, "will you let me kiss your hand?"

"I am glad that you are going to Egypt at last, little Swallow," said the Prince, "you have stayed too long here; but you must kiss me on the lips, for I love you."

"It is not to Egypt that I am going," said the Swallow. "I am going to the House of Death. Death is the brother of Sleep, is he not?"

And he kissed the Happy Prince on the lips, and fell down dead at his feet.

At that moment a curious crack sounded inside the statue, as if something had broken. The fact is that the leaden heart had snapped right in two. It certainly was a dreadfully hard frost.

Early the next morning the Mayor was walking in the square below in company with the Town Councillors. As they passed the column he looked up at the statue: "Dear me! how shabby the Happy Prince looks!" he said.

"How shabby indeed!" cried the Town Councillors, who always agreed with the Mayor, and they went up to look at it.

"The ruby has fallen out of his sword, his eyes are gone, and he is golden no longer," said the Mayor; "in fact, he is little better than a beggar!"

"Little better than a beggar," said the Town Councillors.

"And here is actually a dead bird at his feet!" continued the Mayor. "We must really issue a proclamation that birds are not to be allowed to die here." And the Town Clerk made a note of the suggestion.

So they pulled down the statue of the Happy Prince. "As he is no longer beautiful he is no longer useful," said the Art Professor at the University.

Then they melted the statue in a furnace, and the Mayor held a meeting of the Corporation to decide what was to be done with the metal. "We must have another statue, of course," he said, "and it shall be a statue of myself."

"Of myself," said each of the Town Councillors, and they quarrelled. When I last heard of them they were quarrelling still.

"What a strange thing," said the overseer of the workmen at the foundry. "This broken lead heart will not melt in the furnace. We must throw it away." So they threw it on a dust heap where the dead Swallow was also lying.

"Bring me the two most precious things in the city," said God to one of His Angels; and the Angel brought Him the leaden heart and the dead bird.

"You have rightly chosen," said God, "for in my garden of Paradise this little bird shall sing for evermore, and in my city of gold the Happy Prince shall praise me."

The Nightingale and the Rose

THE NIGHTINGALE AND THE ROSE.

"She said that she would dance with me if I brought her red roses," cried the young Student; "but in all my garden there is no red rose."

From her nest in the holm-oak tree the Nightingale heard him, and she looked out through the leaves, and wondered.

"No red rose in all my garden!" he cried, and his beautiful eyes filled with tears. "Ah, on what little things does happiness depend! I have read all that the wise men have written, and all the secrets of philosophy are mine, yet for want of a red rose is my life made wretched."

"Here at last is a true lover," said the Nightingale. "Night after night have I sung of him, though I knew him not: night after night have I told his story to the stars, and now I see him. His hair is dark as the hyacinth-blossom, and his lips are red as the rose of his desire; but passion

has made his face like pale ivory, and sorrow has set her seal upon his brow."

"The Prince gives a ball to-morrow night," murmured the young student, "and my love will be of the company. If I bring her a red rose she will dance with me till dawn. If I bring her a red rose, I shall hold her in my arms, and she will lean her head upon my shoulder, and her hand will be clasped in mine. But there is no red rose in my garden, so I shall sit lonely, and she will pass me by. She will have no heed of me, and my heart will break."

"Here indeed is the true lover," said the Nightingale. "What I sing of, he suffers: what is joy to me, to him is pain. Surely Love is a wonderful thing. It is more precious than emeralds, and dearer than fine opals. Pearls and pomegranates cannot buy it, nor is it set forth in the market-place. It may not be purchased of the merchants, nor can it be weighed out in the balance for gold."

"The musicians will sit in their gallery," said the young Student, "and play upon their stringed instruments, and my love will dance to the sound of the harp and the violin. She will dance so lightly that her feet will not touch

the floor, and the courtiers in their gay dresses will throng round her. But with me she will not dance, for I have no red rose to give her;" and he flung himself down on the grass, and buried his face in his hands, and wept.

"Why is he weeping?" asked a little Green Lizard, as he ran past him with his tail in the air.

"Why, indeed?" said a Butterfly, who was fluttering about after a sunbeam.

"Why, indeed?" whispered a Daisy to his neighbour, in a soft, low voice.

"He is weeping for a red rose," said the Nightingale.

"For a red rose!" they cried; "how very ridiculous!" and the little Lizard, who was something of a cynic, laughed outright.

But the Nightingale understood the secret of the Student's sorrow, and she sat silent in the oak-tree, and thought about the mystery of Love.

Suddenly she spread her brown wings for flight, and soared into the air. She passed through the grove like a shadow, and like a shadow she sailed across the garden.

In the centre of the grass-plot was standing

a beautiful Rose-tree, and when she saw it, she flew over to it, and lit upon a spray.

"Give me a red rose," she cried, "and I will sing you my sweetest song."

But the Tree shook its head.

"My roses are white," it answered; "as white as the foam of the sea, and whiter than the snow upon the mountain. But go to my brother who grows round the old sun-dial, and perhaps he will give you what you want."

So the Nightingale flew over to the Rose-tree that was growing round the old sun-dial.

"Give me a red rose," she cried, "and I will sing you my sweetest song."

But the Tree shook its head.

"My roses are yellow," it answered; "as yellow as the hair of the mermaiden who sits upon an amber throne, and yellower than the daffodil that blooms in the meadow before the mower comes with his scythe. But go to my brother who grows beneath the Student's window, and perhaps he will give you what you want."

So the Nightingale flew over to the Rose-tree that was growing beneath the Student's window.

"Give me a red rose," she cried, "and I will sing you my sweetest song."

But the Tree shook its head.

"My roses are red," it answered; "as red as the feet of the dove, and redder than the great fans of coral that wave and wave in the ocean cavern. But the winter has chilled my veins, and the frost has nipped my buds, and the storm has broken my branches, and I shall have no roses at all this year."

"One red rose is all I want," cried the Nightingale, "Only one red rose! Is there any way by which I can get it?"

"There is a way," answered the Tree; "but it is so terrible that I dare not tell it to you."

"Tell it to me," said the Nightingale, "I am not afraid."

"If you want a red rose," said the Tree, "you must build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with your own heart's-blood. You must sing to me with your breast against a thorn. All night long you must sing to me, and the thorn must pierce your heart, and your life-blood must flow into my veins, and become mine."

"Death is a great price to pay for a red

rose," cried the Nightingale, "and Life is very dear to all. It is pleasant to sit in the green wood, and to watch the Sun in his chariot of gold, and the Moon in her chariot of pearl. Sweet is the scent of the hawthorn, and sweet are the bluebells that hide in the valley, and the heather that blows on the hill. Yet Love is better than Life, and what is the heart of a bird compared to the heart of a man?"

So she spread her brown wings for flight, and soared into the air. She swept over the garden like a shadow, and like a shadow she sailed through the grove.

The young Student was still lying on the grass, where she had left him, and the tears were not yet dry in his beautiful eyes.

"Be happy," cried the Nightingale, "be happy; you shall have your red rose. I will build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with my own heart's-blood. All that I ask of you in return is that you will be a true lover, for Love is wiser than Philosophy, though she is wise, and mightier than Power, though he is mighty. Flame-coloured are his wings, and coloured like flame is his body. His lips are

sweet as honey, and his breath is like frankincense."

The Student looked up from the grass, and listened, but he could not understand what the Nightingale was saying to him, for he only knew the things that are written down in books.

But the Oak-tree understood, and felt sad, for he was very fond of the little Nightingale who had built her nest in his branches.

"Sing me one last song," he whispered; "I shall feel very lonely when you are gone."

So the Nightingale sang to the Oak-tree, and her voice was like water bubbling from a silver jar.

When she had finished her song the Student got up, and pulled a note-book and a lead-pencil out of his pocket.

"She has form," he said to himself, as he walked away through the grove—"that cannot be denied her; but has she got feeling? I am afraid not. In fact, she is like most artists; she is all style, without any sincerity. She would not sacrifice herself for others. She thinks merely of music, and everybody knows that the arts are selfish. Still, it must be admitted that she has some beautiful notes in her voice. What

a pity it is that they do not mean anything, or do any practical good.'' And he went into his room, and lay down on his little pallet-bed, and began to think of his love; and, after a time, he fell asleep.

And when the Moon shone in the heavens the Nightingale flew to the Rose-tree, and set her breast against the thorn. All night long she sang with her breast against the thorn, and the cold crystal Moon leaned down and listened. All night long she sang, and the thorn went deeper and deeper into her breast, and her life-blood ebbed away from her.

She sang first of the birth of love in the heart of a boy and a girl. And on the topmost spray of the Rose-tree there blossomed a marvellous rose, petal followed petal, as song followed song. Pale was it, at first, as the mist that hangs over the river—pale as the feet of the morning, and silver as the wings of the dawn. As the shadow of a rose in a mirror of silver, as the shadow of a rose in a water-pool, so was the rose that blossomed on the topmost spray of the Tree.

But the Tree cried to the Nightingale to press closer against the thorn. ''Press closer, little

Nightingale," cried the Tree, "or the Day will come before the rose is finished."

So the Nightingale pressed closer against the thorn, and louder and louder grew her song, for she sang of the birth of passion in the soul of a man and a maid.

And a delicate flush of pink came into the leaves of the rose, like the flush in the face of the bridegroom when he kisses the lips of the bride. But the thorn had not yet reached her heart, so the rose's heart remained white, for only a Nightingale's heart's-blood can crimson the heart of a rose.

And the Tree cried to the Nightingale to press closer against the thorn. "Press closer, little Nightingale," cried the Tree, "or the Day will come before the rose is finished."

So the Nightingale pressed closer against the thorn, and the thorn touched her heart, and a fierce pang of pain shot through her. Bitter, bitter was the pain, and wilder and wilder grew her song, for she sang of the Love that is perfected by Death, of the Love that dies not in the tomb.

And the marvellous rose became crimson, like the rose of the eastern sky. Crimson was the

girdle of petals, and crimson as a ruby was the heart.

But the Nightingale's voice grew fainter, and her little wings began to beat, and a film came over her eyes. Fainter and fainter grew her song, and she felt something choking her in her throat.

Then she gave one last burst of music. The white Moon heard it, and she forgot the dawn, and lingered on in the sky. The red rose heard it, and it trembled all over with ecstasy, and opened its petals to the cold morning air. Echo bore it to her purple cavern in the hills, and woke the sleeping shepherds from their dreams. It floated through the reeds of the river, and they carried its message to the sea.

"Look, look!" cried the Tree, "the rose is finished now;" but the Nightingale made no answer, for she was lying dead in the long grass, with the thorn in her heart.

And at noon the Student opened his window and looked out.

"Why, what a wonderful piece of luck!" he cried; "here is a red rose! I have never seen any rose like it in all my life. It is so beauti-

ful that I am sure it has a long Latin name;" and he leaned down and plucked it.

Then he put on his hat, and ran up to the Professor's house with the rose in his hand.

The daughter of the Professor was sitting in the doorway winding blue silk on a reel, and her little dog was lying at her feet.

"You said that you would dance with me if I brought you a red rose," cried the Student. "Here is the reddest rose in all the world. You will wear it to-night next your heart, and as we dance together it will tell you how I love you."

But the girl frowned.

"I am afraid it will not go with my dress," she answered; "and, besides, the Chamberlain's nephew has sent me some real jewels, and everybody knows that jewels cost far more than flowers.

"Well, upon my word, you are very ungrateful," said the Student angrily; and he threw the rose into the street, where it fell into the gutter, and a cart-wheel went over it.

"Ungrateful!" said the girl. "I tell you what, you are very rude; and, after all, who are you? Only a Student. Why, I don't believe

you have even got silver buckles to your shoes as the Chamberlain's nephew has;'' and she got up from her chair and went into the house.

''What a silly thing Love is,'' said the Student as he walked away. ''It is not half as useful as Logic, for it does not prove anything, and it is always telling one of things that are not going to happen, and making one believe things that are not true. In fact, it is quite unpractical, and, as in this age to be practical is everything, I shall go back to Philosophy and study Metaphysics.''

So he returned to his room and pulled out a great dusty book, and began to read.

The Selfish Giant

THE SELFISH GIANT.

Every afternoon, as they were coming from school, the children used to go and play in the Giant's garden.

It was a large lovely garden, with soft green grass. Here and there over the grass stood beautiful flowers like stars, and there were twelve peach-trees that in the spring-time broke out into delicate blossoms of pink and pearl, and in the autumn bore rich fruit. The birds sat on the trees and sang so sweetly that the children used to stop their games in order to listen to them. "How happy we are here!" they cried to each other.

One day the Giant came back. He had been to visit his friend the Cornish ogre, and had stayed with him for seven years. After the seven years were over he had said all that he had to say, for his conversation was limited, and he determined to return to his own castle. When he arrived he saw the children playing in the garden.

"What are you doing there?" he cried in a very gruff voice, and the children ran away.

"My own garden is my own garden," said the Giant; "any one can understand that, and I will allow nobody to play in it but myself." So he built a high wall all round it, and put up a notice-board.

TRESPASSERS
WILL BE
PROSECUTED.

He was a very selfish Giant.

The poor children had now nowhere to play. They tried to play on the road, but the road was very dusty and full of hard stones, and they did not like it. They used to wander round the high wall when their lessons were over, and talk about the beautiful garden inside. "How happy we were there," they said to each other.

Then the Spring came, and all over the country there were little blossoms and little birds. Only in the garden of the Selfish Giant it was still winter. The birds did not care to sing in it as there were no children, and the trees forgot

to blossom. Once a beautiful flower put its head out from the grass, but when it saw the notice-board it was so sorry for the children that it slipped back into the ground again, and went off to sleep. The only people who were pleased were the Snow and the Frost. "Spring has forgotten this garden," they cried, "so we will live here all the year round." The Snow covered up the grass with her great white cloak, and the Frost painted all the trees silver. Then they invited the North Wind to stay with them, and he came. He was wrapped in furs, and he roared all day about the garden, and blew the chimney-pots down. "This is a delightful spot," he said, "we must ask the Hail on a visit." So the Hail came. Every day for three hours he rattled on the roof of the castle till he broke most of the slates, and then he ran round and round the garden as fast as he could go. He was dressed in grey, and his breath was like ice.

"I cannot understand why the Spring is so late in coming," said the Selfish Giant, as he sat at the window and looked out at his cold white garden; "I hope there will be a change in the weather."

But the Spring never came, nor the Summer. The Autumn gave golden fruit to every garden, but to the Giant's garden she gave none. "He is too selfish," she said. So it was always Winter there, and the North Wind, and the Hail, and the Frost, and the Snow danced about through the trees.

One morning the Giant was lying awake in bed when he heard some lovely music. It sounded so sweet to his ears that he thought it must be the King's musicians passing by. It was really only a little linnet singing outside his window, but it was so long since he had heard a bird sing in his garden that it seemed to him to be the most beautiful music in the world. Then the Hail stopped dancing over his head, and the North Wind ceased roaring, and a delicious perfume came to him through the open casement. "I believe the Spring has come at last," said the Giant; and he jumped out of bed and looked out.

What did he see?

He saw a most wonderful sight. Through a little hole in the wall the children had crept in, and they were sitting in the branches of the trees. In every tree that he could see there was

a little child. And the trees were so glad to have the children back again that they had covered themselves with blossoms, and were waving their arms gently above the children's heads. The birds were flying about and twittering with delight, and the flowers were looking up through the green grass and laughing. It was a lovely scene, only in one corner it was still winter. It was the farthest corner of the garden, and in it was standing a little boy. He was so small that he could not reach up to the branches of the tree, and he was wandering all round it, crying bitterly. The poor tree was still quite covered with frost and snow, and the North Wind was blowing and roaring above it. "Climb up! little boy," said the Tree, and it bent its branches down as low as it could; but the boy was too tiny.

And the Giant's heart melted as he looked out. "How selfish I have been!" he said; "now I know why the Spring would not come here. I will put that poor little boy on the top of the tree, and then I will knock down the wall, and my garden shall be the children's playground for ever and ever." He was really very sorry for what he had done.

So he crept downstairs and opened the front door quite softly, and went out into the garden. But when the children saw him they were so frightened that they all ran away, and the garden became winter again. Only the little boy did not run, for his eyes were so full of tears that he did not see the Giant coming. And the Giant stole up behind him and took him gently in his hand, and put him up into the tree. And the tree broke at once into blossom, and the birds came and sang on it, and the little boy stretched out his two arms and flung them round the Giant's neck, and kissed him. And the other children, when they saw that the Giant was not wicked any longer, came running back, and with them came the Spring. "It is your garden now, little children," said the Giant, and he took a great axe and knocked down the wall. And when the people were going to market at twelve o'clock they found the Giant playing with the children in the most beautiful garden they had ever seen.

All day long they played, and in the evening they came to the Giant to bid him good-bye.

"But where is your little companion?" he

said: "the boy I put into the tree." The Giant loved him the best because he had kissed him.

"We don't know," answered the children; "he has gone away."

"You must tell him to be sure and come here to-morrow," said the Giant. But the children said that they did not know where he lived, and had never seen him before; and the Giant felt very sad.

Every afternoon, when school was over, the children came and played with the Giant. But the little boy whom the Giant loved was never seen again. The Giant was very kind to all the children, yet he longed for his first little friend, and often spoke of him. "How I would like to see him!" he used to say.

Years went over, and the Giant grew very old and feeble. He could not play about any more, so he sat in a huge armchair, and watched the children at their games, and admired his garden. "I have many beautiful flowers," he said; "but the children are the most beautiful flowers of all."

One winter morning he looked out of his window as he was dressing. He did not hate the Winter now, for he knew that it was merely

the Spring asleep, and that the flowers were resting.

Suddenly he rubbed his eyes in wonder, and looked and looked. It certainly was a marvellous sight. In the farthest corner of the garden was a tree quite covered with lovely white blossoms. Its branches were all golden, and silver fruit hung down from them, and underneath it stood the little boy he had loved.

Downstairs ran the Giant in great joy, and out into the garden. He hastened across the grass, and came near to the child. And when he came quite close his face grew red with anger, and he said, "Who hath dared to wound thee?" For on the palms of the child's hands were the prints of two nails, and the prints of two nails were on the little feet.

"Who hath dared to wound thee?" cried the Giant; "tell me, that I may take my big sword and slay him."

"Nay!" answered the child; "but these are the wounds of Love."

"Who art thou?" said the Giant, and a strange awe fell on him, and he knelt before the little child.

And the child smiled on the Giant, and said to him, "You let me play once in your garden, to-day you shall come with me to my garden, which is Paradise."

And when the children ran in that afternoon, they found the Giant lying dead under the tree, all covered with white blossoms.

The Devoted Friend

THE DEVOTED FRIEND.

One morning the old Water-rat put his head out of his hole. He had bright beady eyes and stiff grey whiskers, and his tail was like a long bit of black india-rubber. The little ducks were swimming about in the pond, looking just like a lot of yellow canaries, and their mother, who was pure white with real red legs, was trying to teach them how to stand on their heads in the water.

"You will never be in the best society unless you can stand on your heads," she kept saying to them; and every now and then she showed them how it was done. But the little ducks paid no attention to her. They were so young that they did not know what an advantage it is to be in society at all.

"What disobedient children!" cried the old Water-rat; "they really deserve to be drowned."

"Nothing of the kind," answered the Duck;

"every one must make a beginning, and parents cannot be too patient."

"Ah! I know nothing about the feelings of parents," said the Water-rat; "I am not a family man. In fact, I have never been married, and I never intend to be. Love is all very well in its way, but friendship is much higher. Indeed, I know of nothing in the world that is either nobler or rarer than a devoted friendship."

"And what, pray, is your idea of the duties of a devoted friend?" asked a Green Linnet, who was sitting in a willow-tree hard by, and had overheard the conversation.

"Yes, that is just what I want to know," said the Duck, and she swam away to the end of the pond, and stood upon her head, in order to give her children a good example.

"What a silly question!" cried the Water-rat. "I should expect my devoted friend to be devoted to me, of course."

"And what would you do in return?" said the little bird, swinging upon a silver spray, and flapping his tiny wings.

"I don't understand you," answered the Water-rat.

"Let me tell you a story on the subject," said the Linnet.

"Is the story about me?" asked the Water-rat. "If so, I will listen to it, for I am extremely fond of fiction."

"It is applicable to you," answered the Linnet; and he flew down, and alighting upon the bank, he told the story of The Devoted Friend.

"Once upon a time," said the Linnet, "there was an honest little fellow named Hans."

"Was he very distinguished?" asked the Water-rat.

"No," answered the Linnet, "I don't think he was distinguished at all, except for his kind heart, and his funny round good-humoured face. He lived in a tiny cottage all by himself, and every day he worked in his garden. In all the country-side there was no garden so lovely as his. Sweet-william grew there, and Gilly-flowers, and Shepherd's-purses, and Fair-maids of France. There were damask Roses, and yellow Roses, lilac Crocuses, and gold, purple Violets and white. Columbine and Ladysmock, Marjoram and Wild Basil, the Cowslip and the Flower-de-luce, the Daffodil and the Clove-Pink bloomed or blossomed in their proper order as

the months went by, one flower taking another flower's place, so that there were always beautiful things to look at, and pleasant odours to smell.

"Little Hans had a great many friends, but the most devoted friend of all was big Hugh the Miller. Indeed, so devoted was the rich Miller to little Hans, that he would never go by his garden without leaning over the wall and plucking a large nosegay, or a handful of sweet herbs, or filling his pockets with plums and cherries if it was the fruit season.

"'Real friends should have everything in common,' the Miller used to say, and little Hans nodded and smiled, and felt very proud of having a friend with such noble ideas.

"Sometimes, indeed, the neighbours thought it strange that the rich Miller never gave little Hans anything in return, though he had a hundred sacks of flour stored away in his mill, and six milch cows, and a large flock of woolly sheep; but Hans never troubled his head about these things, and nothing gave him greater pleasure than to listen to all the wonderful things the Miller used to say about the unselfishness of true friendship.

"So little Hans worked away in his garden. During the spring, the summer, and the autumn he was very happy, but when the winter came, and he had no fruit or flowers to bring to the market, he suffered a good deal from cold and hunger, and often had to go to bed without any supper but a few dried pears or some hard nuts. In the winter, also, he was extremely lonely, as the Miller never came to see him then.

" 'There is no good in my going to see little Hans as long as the snow lasts,' the Miller used to say to his wife, 'for when people are in trouble they should be left alone, and not be bothered by visitors. That at least is my idea about friendship, and I am sure I am right. So I shall wait till the spring comes, and then I shall pay him a visit, and he will be able to give me a large basket of primroses, and that will make him so happy.'

" 'You are certainly very thoughtful about others,' answered the Wife, as she sat in her comfortable armchair by the big pinewood fire; 'very thoughtful indeed. It is quite a treat to hear you talk about friendship. I am sure the clergyman himself could not say such beautiful things as you do, though he does live in a three-

storied house, and wear a gold ring on his little finger.'

"'But could we not ask little Hans up here?' said the Miller's youngest son. 'If poor Hans is in trouble I will give him half my porridge, and show him my white rabbits.'

"'What a silly boy you are!' cried the Miller; 'I really don't know what is the use of sending you to school. You seem not to learn anything. Why, if little Hans came up here, and saw our warm fire, and our good supper, and our great cask of red wine, he might get envious, and envy is a most terrible thing, and would spoil anybody's nature. I certainly will not allow Hans's nature to be spoiled. I am his best friend, and I will always watch over him, and see that he is not led into any temptations. Besides, if Hans came here, he might ask me to let him have some flour on credit, and that I could not do. Flour is one thing, and friendship is another, and they should not be confused. Why, the words are spelt differently, and mean quite different things. Everybody can see that."

"'How well you talk!' said the Miller's Wife, pouring herself out a large glass of warm ale;

'really I feel quite drowsy. It is just like being in church.'

"'Lots of people act well,' answered the Miller; 'but very few people talk well, which shows that talking is much the more difficult thing of the two, and much the finer thing also;' and he looked sternly across the table at his little son, who felt so ashamed of himself that he hung his head down, and grew quite scarlet, and began to cry into his tea. However, he was so young that you must excuse him."

"Is that the end of the story?" asked the Water-rat.

"Certainly not," answered the Linnet. "that is the beginning."

"Then you are quite behind the age," said the Water-rat. "Every good story-teller nowadays starts with the end, and then goes on to the beginning, and concludes with the middle. That is the new method. I heard all about it the other day from a critic who was walking round the pond with a young man. He spoke of the matter at great length, and I am sure he must have been right, for he had blue spectacles and a bald head, and whenever the young man made any remark, he always answered 'Pooh!'

But pray go on with your story. I like the Miller immensely. I have all kinds of beautiful sentiments myself, so there is a great sympathy between us."

"Well," said the Linnet, hopping now on one leg and now on the other, "as soon as the winter was over, and the primroses began to open their pale yellow stars, the Miller said to his wife that he would go down and see little Hans.

"'Why, what a good heart you have!' cried his Wife; 'you are always thinking of others. And mind you take the big basket with you for the flowers.'

"So the Miller tied the sails of the windmill together with a strong iron chain, and went down the hill with the basket on his arm.

"'Good morning, little Hans,' said the Miller.

"'Good morning,' said Hans, leaning on his spade, and smiling from ear to ear.

"'And how have you been all the winter?' said the Miller.

"'Well, really,' cried Hans, 'it is very good of you to ask, very good indeed. I am afraid I had rather a hard time of it, but now the spring

has come, and I am quite happy, and all my flowers are doing well.'

"'We often talked of you during the winter, Hans,' said the Miller, 'and wondered how you were getting on.'

"'That was kind of you,' said Hans; I was half afraid you had forgotten me.'

"'Hans, I am surprised at you,' said the Miller; 'friendship never forgets. That is the wonderful thing about it, but I am afraid you don't understand the poetry of life. How lovely your primroses are looking, by-the-bye!'

"'They are certainly very lovely,' said Hans, 'and it is a most lucky thing for me that I have so many. I am going to bring them into the market and sell them to the Burgomaster's daughter, and buy back my wheelbarrow with the money.'

"'Buy back your wheelbarrow? You don't mean to say you have sold it? What a very stupid thing to do!'

"'Well, the fact is,' said Hans, 'that I was obliged to. You see the winter was a very bad time for me, and I really had no money at all to buy bread with. So I first sold the silver buttons off my Sunday coat, and then I sold my

silver chain, and then I sold my big pipe, and at last I sold my wheelbarrow. But I am going to buy them all back again now.'

"'Hans,' said the Miller, 'I will give you my wheelbarrow. It is not in very good repair; indeed, one side is gone, and there is something wrong with the wheel-spokes; but in spite of that I will give it to you. I know it is very generous of me, and a great many people would think me extremely foolish for parting with it, but I am not like the rest of the world. I think that generosity is the essence of friendship, and, besides, I have got a new wheelbarrow for myself. Yes, you may set your mind at ease, I will give you my wheelbarrow.'

"'Well, really, that is generous of you,' said little Hans, and his funny round face glowed all over with pleasure. 'I can easily put it in repair, as I have a plank of wood in the house.'

"'A plank of wood!' said the Miller; 'why, that is just what I want for the roof of my barn. There is a very large hole in it, and the corn will all get damp if I don't stop it up. How lucky you mentioned it! It is quite remarkable how one good action always breeds another. I have given you my wheelbarrow, and now you

are going to give me your plank. Of course, the wheelbarrow is worth far more than the plank, but true friendship never notices things like that. Pray get it at once, and I will set to work at my barn this very day.'

"'Certainly,' cried little Hans, and he ran into the shed and dragged the plank out.

"'It is not a very big plank,' said the Miller, looking at it, 'and I am afraid that after I have mended my barn-roof there won't be any left for you to mend the wheelbarrow with; but, of course, that is not my fault. And now, as I have given you my wheelbarrow, I am sure you would like to give me some flowers in return. Here is the basket, and mind you fill it quite full.'

"'Quite full?' said little Hans, rather sorrowfully, for it was really a very big basket, and he knew that if he filled it he would have no flowers left for the market, and he was very anxious to get his silver buttons back.

"'Well, really,' answered the Miller, 'as I have given you my wheelbarrow, I don't think that it is much to ask you for a few flowers. I may be wrong, but I should have thought that friendship, true friendship, was quite free from selfishness of any kind.'

"'My dear friend, my best friend,' cried little Hans, 'you are welcome to all the flowers in my garden. I would much sooner have your good opinion than my silver buttons, any day,' and he ran and plucked all his pretty primroses, and filled the Miller's basket.

"'Good-bye, little Hans,' said the Miller, as he went up the hill with the plank on his shoulder, and the big basket in his hand.

"'Good-bye,' said little Hans, and he began to dig away quite merrily, he was so pleased about the wheelbarrow.

"The next day he was nailing up some honeysuckle against the porch, when he heard the Miller's voice calling to him from the road. So he jumped off the ladder, and ran down the garden, and looked over the wall.

"There was the Miller with a large sack of flour on his back.

"'Dear little Hans,' said the Miller, 'would you mind carrying this sack of flour for me to market?'

"'Oh, I am so sorry,' said Hans, 'but I am really very busy to-day. I have got all my creepers to nail up, and all my flowers to water, and all my grass to roll.'

"'Well, really,' said the Miller, 'I think that, considering that I am going to give you my wheelbarrow, it is rather unfriendly of you to refuse.'

"'Oh, don't say that,' cried little Hans, 'I wouldn't be unfriendly for the whole world;' and he ran in for his cap, and trudged off with the big sack on his shoulders.

"It was a very hot day, and the road was terribly dusty, and before Hans had reached the sixth milestone he was so tired that he had to sit down and rest. However, he went on bravely, and at last he reached the market. After he had waited there some time, he sold the sack of flour for a very good price, and then he returned home at once, for he was afraid that if he stopped too late he might meet some robbers on the way.

"'It has certainly been a hard day,' said little Hans to himself as he was going to bed, 'but I am glad I did not refuse the Miller, for he is my best friend, and, besides, he is going to give me his wheelbarrow.'

"Early the next morning the Miller came down to get the money for his sack of flour, but little Hans was so tired that he was still in bed.

"'Upon my word,' said the Miller, 'you are very lazy. Really, considering that I am going to give you my wheelbarrow, I think you might work harder. Idleness is a great sin, and I certainly don't like any of my friends to be idle or sluggish. You must not mind my speaking quite plainly to you. Of course I should not dream of doing so if I were not your friend. But what is the good of friendship if one cannot say exactly what one means? Anybody can say charming things and try to please and to flatter, but a true friend always says unpleasant things, and does not mind giving pain. Indeed, if he is a really true friend he prefers it, for he knows that then he is doing good.'

"'I am very sorry,' said little Hans, rubbing his eyes and pulling off his nightcap, 'but I was so tired that I thought I would lie in bed for a little time, and listen to the birds singing. Do you know that I always work better after hearing the birds sing?'

"'Well, I am glad of that,' said the Miller, clapping little Hans on the back, 'for I want you to come up to the mill as soon as you are dressed, and mend my barn-roof for me.'

"Poor little Hans was very anxious to go and work in his garden, for his flowers had not been watered for two days, but he did not like to refuse the Miller, as he was such a good friend to him.

" 'Do you think it would be unfriendly of me if I said I was busy?' he inquired in a shy and timid voice.

" 'Well, really,' answered the Miller, 'I do not think it is much to ask of you, considering that I am going to give you my wheelbarrow; but of course if you refuse I will go and do it myself.'

" 'Oh! on no account,' cried little Hans; and he jumped out of bed, and dressed himself, and went up to the barn.

"He worked there all day long, till sunset, and at sunset the Miller came to see how he was getting on.

" 'Have you mended the hole in the roof yet, little Hans?' cried the Miller in a cheery voice.

" 'It is quite mended,' answered little Hans, coming down the ladder.

" 'Ah!' said the Miller, 'there is no work so delightful as the work one does for others.'

" 'It is certainly a great privilege to hear you

talk,' answered little Hans, sitting down and wiping his forehead, 'a very great privilege. But I am afraid I shall never have such beautiful ideas as you have.'

"'Oh! they will come to you,' said the Miller, 'but you must take more pains. At present you have only the practice of friendship; some day you will have the theory also.'

"'Do you really think I shall?' asked little Hans.

"'I have no doubt of it,' answered the Miller; 'but now that you have mended the roof, you had better go home and rest, for I want you to drive my sheep to the mountain to-morrow.'

"Poor little Hans was afraid to say anything to this, and early the next morning the Miller brought his sheep round to the cottage, and Hans started off with them to the mountain. It took him the whole day to get there and back; and when he returned he was so tired that he went off to sleep in his chair, and did not wake up till it was broad daylight.

"'What a delightful time I shall have in my garden,' he said, and he went to work at once.

"But somehow he was never able to look after his flowers at all, for his friend the Miller was

always coming round and sending him off on long errands, or getting him to help at the mill. Little Hans was very much distressed at times, as he was afraid his flowers would think he had forgotten them, but he consoled himself by the reflection that the Miller was his best friend. 'Besides,' he used to say, 'he is going to give me his wheelbarrow, and that is an act of pure generosity.'

"So little Hans worked away for the Miller, and the Miller said all kinds of beautiful things about friendship, which Hans took down in a note-book, and used to read over at night, for he was a very good scholar.

"Now it happened that one evening little Hans was sitting by his fireside when a loud rap came at the door. It was a very wild night, and the wind was blowing and roaring round the house so terribly that at first he thought it was merely the storm. But a second rap came, and then a third, louder than either of the others.

" 'It is some poor traveller,' said little Hans to himself, and he ran to the door.

"There stood the Miller with a lantern in one hand and a big stick in the other.

" 'Dear little Hans,' cried the Miller, 'I am

in great trouble. My little boy has fallen off a ladder and hurt himself, and I am going for the Doctor. But he lives so far away, and it is such a bad night, that it has just occurred to me that it would be much better if you went instead of me. You know I am going to give you my wheelbarrow, and so it is only fair that you should do something for me in return.'

"'Certainly,' cried little Hans, 'I take it quite as a compliment your coming to me, and I will start off at once. But you must lend me your lantern, as the night is so dark that I am afraid I might fall into the ditch.'

"'I am very sorry,' answered the Miller, 'but it is my new lantern, and it would be a great loss to me if anything happened to it.'

"'Well, never mind, I will do without it,' cried little Hans, and he took down his great fur coat, and his warm scarlet cap, and tied a muffler round his throat, and started off.

"What a dreadful night it was! The night was so black that little Hans could hardly see, and the wind was so strong that he could scarcely stand. However, he was very courageous, and after he had been walking about three hours,

he arrived at the Doctor's house, and knocked at the door.

"'Who is there?' cried the Doctor, putting his head out of his bedroom window.

"'Little Hans, Doctor.'

"'What do you want, little Hans?'

"'The Miller's son has fallen from a ladder, and has hurt himself, and the Miller wants you to come at once.'

"'All right!' said the Doctor; and he ordered his horse, and his big boots, and his lantern, and came downstairs, and rode off in the direction of the Miller's house, little Hans trudging behind him.

"But the storm grew worse and worse, and the rain fell in torrents, and little Hans could not see where he was going, or keep up with the horse. At last he lost his way, and wandered off on the moor, which was a very dangerous place, as it was full of deep holes, and there poor little Hans was drowned. His body was found the next day by some goatherds, floating in a great pool of water, and was brought back by them to the cottage.

"Everybody went to little Hans's funeral, as

he was so popular, and the Miller was the chief mourner.

"'As I was his best friend,' said the Miller, 'it is only fair that I should have the best place;' so he walked at the head of the procession in a long black cloak, and every now and then he wiped his eyes with a big pocket-handkerchief.

"'Little Hans is certainly a great loss to every one,' said the Blacksmith, when the funeral was over, and they were all seated comfortably in the inn, drinking spiced wine and eating sweet cakes.

"'A great loss to me at any rate,' answered the Miller; 'why, I had as good as given him my wheelbarrow, and now I really don't know what to do with it. It is very much in my way at home, and it is in such bad repair that I could not get anything for it if I sold it. I will certainly take care not to give away anything again. One always suffers for being generous.'"

"Well?" said the Water-rat, after a long pause.

"Well, that is the end," said the Linnet.

"But what became of the Miller?" asked the Water-rat.

"Oh! I really don't know," replied the Linnet; "and I am sure that I don't care."

"It is quite evident then that you have no sympathy in your nature," said the Water-rat.

"I am afraid you don't quite see the moral of the story," remarked the Linnet.

"The what?" screamed the Water-rat.

"The moral."

"Do you mean to say that the story has a moral?"

"Certainly," said the Linnet.

"Well, really," said the Water-rat, in a very angry manner, "I think you should have told me that before you began. If you had done so, I certainly would not have listened to you; in fact, I should have said 'Pooh,' like the critic. However, I can say it now;" so he shouted out "Pooh" at the top of his voice, gave a whisk with his tail, and went back into his hole.

"And how do you like the Water-rat?" asked the Duck, who came paddling up some minutes afterwards. "He has a great many good points, but for my own part I have a mother's feelings, and I can never look at a confirmed bachelor without the tears coming into my eyes."

"I am rather afraid that I have annoyed him," said the Linnet. "The fact is, that I told him a story with a moral."

"Ah! that is always a very dangerous thing to do," said the Duck.

And I quite agree with her.

The Remarkable Rocket

THE REMARKABLE ROCKET.

The King's son was going to be married, so there were general rejoicings. He had waited a whole year for his bride, and at last she had arrived. She was a Russian Princess, and had driven all the way from Finland in a sledge drawn by six reindeer. The sledge was shaped like a great golden swan, and between the swan's wings lay the little Princess herself. Her long ermine cloak reached right down to her feet, on her head was a tiny cap of silver tissue, and she was as pale as the Snow Palace in which she had always lived. So pale was she that as she drove through the streets all the people wondered. "She is like a white rose!" they cried, and they threw down flowers on her from the balconies.

At the gate of the Castle the Prince was waiting to receive her. He had dreamy violet eyes, and his hair was like fine gold. When he saw her he sank upon one knee, and kissed her hand.

"Your picture was beautiful," he murmured, "but you are more beautiful than your picture;" and the little Princess blushed.

"She was like a white rose before," said a young Page to his neighbour, "but she is like a red rose now;" and the whole Court was delighted.

For the next three days everybody went about saying, "White rose, Red rose, Red rose, White rose;" and the King gave orders that the Page's salary was to be doubled. As he received no salary at all this was not of much use to him, but it was considered a great honour, and was duly published in the Court Gazette.

When the three days were over the marriage was celebrated. It was a magnificent ceremony, and the bride and bridegroom walked hand in hand under a canopy of purple velvet embroidered with little pearls. Then there was a State Banquet, which lasted for five hours. The Prince and Princess sat at the top of the Great Hall and drank out of a cup of clear crystal. Only true lovers could drink out of this cup, for if false lips touched it, it grew grey and dull and cloudy.

"It is quite clear that they love each other," said the little Page, "as clear as crystal!" and the King doubled his salary a second time. "What an honour!" cried all the courtiers.

After the banquet there was to be a Ball. The bride and bridegroom were to dance the Rose-dance together, and the King had promised to play the flute. He played very badly, but no one had ever dared to tell him so, because he was the King. Indeed, he only knew two airs, and was never quite certain which one he was playing; but it made no matter, for, whatever he did, everybody cried out, "Charming! charming!"

The last item on the programme was a grand display of fireworks, to be let off exactly at midnight. The little Princess had never seen a firework in her life, so the King had given orders that the Royal Pyrotechnist should be in attendance on the day of her marriage.

"What are fireworks like?" she had asked the Prince, one morning, as she was walking on the terrace.

"They are like the Aurora Borealis," said the King, who always answered questions that were addressed to other people, "only much more

natural. I prefer them to stars myself, as you always know when they are going to appear, and they are as delightful as my own flute-playing. You must certainly see them."

So at the end of the King's garden a great stand had been set up, and as soon as the Royal Pyrotechnist had put everything in its proper place, the fireworks began to talk to each other.

"The world is certainly very beautiful," cried a little Squib. "Just look at those yellow tulips. Why! if they were real crackers they could not be lovelier. I am very glad I have travelled. Travel improves the mind wonderfully, and does away with all one's prejudices."

"The King's garden is not the world, you foolish squib," said a big Roman Candle; "the world is an enormous place, and it would take you three days to see it thoroughly."

"Any place you love is the world to you," exclaimed a pensive Catharine Wheel, who had been attached to an old deal box in early life, and prided herself on her broken heart; "but love is not fashionable any more, the poets have killed it. They wrote so much about it that nobody believed them, and I am not surprised. True love suffers, and is silent. I remember my-

self once——. But it is no matter now. Romance is a thing of the past."

"Nonsense!" said the Roman Candle, "Romance never dies. It is like the moon, and lives for ever. The bride and bridegroom, for instance, love each other very dearly. I heard all about them this morning from a brown-paper cartridge, who happened to be staying in the same drawer as myself, and knew the latest Court news."

But the Catharine Wheel shook her head. "Romance is dead, Romance is dead, Romance is dead," she murmured. She was one of those people who think that, if you say the same thing over and over a great many times, it becomes true in the end.

Suddenly, a sharp, dry cough was heard, and they all looked round.

It came from a tall, supercilious-looking Rocket, who was tied to the end of a long stick. He always coughed before he made any observation, so as to attract attention.

"Ahem! ahem!" he said, and everybody listened except the poor Catharine Wheel, who was still shaking her head, and murmuring, "Romance is dead."

"Order! order!" cried out a Cracker. He was something of a politician, and had always taken a prominent part in the local elections, so he knew the proper Parliamentary expressions to use.

"Quite dead," whispered the Catharine Wheel, and she went off to sleep.

As soon as there was perfect silence, the Rocket coughed a third time and began. He spoke with a very slow, distinct voice, as if he was dictating his memoirs, and always looked over the shoulder of the person to whom he was talking. In fact, he had a most distinguished manner.

"How fortunate it is for the King's son," he remarked, "that he is to be married on the very day on which I am to be let off. Really, if it had been arranged beforehand, it could not have turned out better for him; but Princes are always lucky."

"Dear me!" said the little Squib, "I thought it was quite the other way, and that we were to be let off in the Prince's honour."

"It may be so with you," he answered, "indeed, I have no doubt that it is, but with me it is different. I am a very remarkable Rocket, and

come of remarkable parents. My mother was the most celebrated Catharine Wheel of her day, and was renowned for her graceful dancing. When she made her great public appearance she spun round nineteen times before she went out, and each time that she did so she threw into the air seven pink stars. She was three feet and a half in diameter, and made of the very best gunpowder. My father was a Rocket like myself, and of French extraction. He flew so high that the people were afraid that he would never come down again. He did, though, for he was of a kindly disposition, and he made a most brilliant descent in a shower of golden rain. The newspapers wrote about his performance in very flattering terms. Indeed, the Court Gazette called him a triumph of Pylotechnic art."

"Pyrotechnic, Pyrotechnic, you mean," said a Bengal Light; "I know it is Pyrotechnic, for I saw it written on my own canister."

"Well, I said Pylotechnic," answered the Rocket, in a severe tone of voice, and the Bengal Light felt so crushed that he began at once to bully the little squibs, in order to show that he was still a person of some importance.

"I was saying," continued the Rocket, "I was saying——. What was I saying?"

"You were talking about yourself," replied the Roman Candle.

"Of course; I knew I was discussing some interesting subject when I was so rudely interrupted. I hate rudeness and bad manners of every kind, for I am extremely sensitive. No one in the whole world is so sensitive as I am, I am quite sure of that."

"What is a sensitive person?" said the Cracker to the Roman Candle.

"A person who, because he has corns himself, always treads on other people's toes," answered the Roman Candle in a low whisper; and the Cracker nearly exploded with laughter.

"Pray, what are you laughing at?" inquired the Rocket; "I am not laughing."

"I am laughing because I am happy," replied the Cracker.

"That is a very selfish reason," said the Rocket angrily. "What right have you to be happy? You should be thinking about others. In fact, you should be thinking about me. I am always thinking about myself, and I expect everybody else to do the same. That is what is

called sympathy. It is a beautiful virtue, and I possess it in a high degree. Suppose, for instance, anything happened to me to-night, what a misfortune that would be for every one! The Prince and Princess would never be happy again, their whole married life would be spoiled; and as for the King, I know he would not get over it. Really, when I begin to reflect on the importance of my position, I am almost moved to tears."

"If you want to give pleasure to others," cried the Roman Candle, "you had better keep yourself dry."

"Certainly," exclaimed the Bengal Light, who was now in better spirits; "that is only common sense."

"Common sense, indeed!" said the Rocket indignantly; "you forget that I am very uncommon, and very remarkable. Why, anybody can have common sense, provided that they have no imagination. But I have imagination, for I never think of things as they really are; I always think of them as being quite different. As for keeping myself dry, there is evidently no one here who can at all appreciate an emotional nature. Fortunately for myself, I don't

care. The only thing that sustains one through life is the consciousness of the immense inferiority of everybody else, and this is a feeling that I have always cultivated. But none of you have any hearts. Here you are laughing and making merry just as if the Prince and Princess had not just been married."

"Well, really," exclaimed a small Fire-balloon, "why not? It is a most joyful occasion, and when I soar up into the air I intend to tell the stars all about it. You will see them twinkle when I talk to them about the pretty bride."

"Ah! what a trivial view of life!" said the Rocket; "but it is only what I expected. There is nothing in you; you are hollow and empty. Why, perhaps the Prince and Princess may go to live in a country where there is a deep river, and perhaps they may have one only son, a little fair-haired boy with violet eyes like the Prince himself; and perhaps some day he may go out to walk with his nurse; and perhaps the nurse may go to sleep under a great elder-tree; and perhaps the little boy may fall into the deep river and be drowned. What a terrible misfortune! Poor people, to lose their only son! It is really too dreadful! I shall never get over it."

"But they have not lost their only son," said the Roman Candle; "no misfortune has happened to them at all."

"I never said that they had," replied the Rocket; "I said that they might. If they had lost their only son there would be no use in saying anything more about the matter. I hate people who cry over spilt milk. But when I think that they might lose their only son, I certainly am very much affected."

"You certainly are!" cried the Bengal Light. "In fact, you are the most affected person I ever met."

"You are the rudest person I ever met," said the Rocket, "and you cannot understand my friendship for the Prince."

"Why, you don't even know him," growled the Roman Candle.

"I never said I knew him," answered the Rocket. "I dare say if I knew him I should not be his friend at all. It is a very dangerous thing to know one's friends."

"You had really better keep yourself dry," said the Fire-balloon. "That is the important thing."

"Very important for you, I have no doubt." answered the Rocket, 'but I shall weep if I choose;" and he actually burst into real tears, which flowed down his stick like rain-drops, and nearly drowned two little beetles, who were just thinking of setting up house together, and were looking for a nice dry spot to live in.

"He must have a truly romantic nature," said the Catharine Wheel, "for he weeps when there is nothing at all to weep about;" and she heaved a deep sigh, and thought about the deal box.

But the Roman Candle and the Bengal Light were quite indignant, and kept saying, "Humbug! humbug!" at the top of their voices. They were extremely practical, and whenever they objected to anything they called it humbug.

Then the moon rose like a wonderful silver shield; and the stars began to shine, and a sound of music came from the palace.

The Prince and Princess were leading the dance. They danced so beautifully that the tall white lilies peeped in at the window and watched them, and the great red poppies nodded their heads and beat time.

Then ten o'clock struck, and then eleven, and then twelve, and at the last stroke of midnight

every one came out on the terrace, and the King sent for the Royal Pyrotechnist.

"Let the fireworks begin," said the King; and the Royal Pyrotechnist made a low bow, and marched down to the end of the garden. He had six attendants with him, each of whom carried a lighted torch at the end of a long pole.

It was certainly a magnificent display.

Whizz! Whizz! went the Catharine Wheel, as she spun round and round. Boom! Boom! went the Roman Candle. Then the Squibs danced all over the place, and the Bengal Lights made everything look scarlet. "Good-bye," cried the Fire-balloon, as he soared away dropping tiny blue sparks. Bang! Bang! answered the Crackers, who were enjoying themselves immensely. Every one was a great success except the Remarkable Rocket. He was so damp with crying that he could not go off at all. The best thing in him was the gunpowder, and that was so wet with tears that it was of no use. All his poor relations, to whom he would never speak, except with a sneer, shot up into the sky like wonderful golden flowers with blossoms of fire. Huzza! Huzza! cried the Court; and the little Princess laughed with pleasure.

"I suppose they are reserving me for some grand occasion," said the Rocket; "no doubt that is what it means," and he looked more supercilious than ever.

The next day the workmen came to put everything tidy. "This is evidently a deputation," said the Rocket; "I will receive them with becoming dignity;" so he put his nose in the air, and began to frown severely as if he were thinking about some very important subject. But they took no notice of him at all till they were just going away. Then one of them caught sight of him. "Hallo!" he cried, "what a bad rocket!" and he threw him over the wall into the ditch.

"BAD Rocket? BAD Rocket?" he said as he whirled through the air; "impossible! GRAND Rocket, that is what the man said. BAD and GRAND sound very much the same, indeed they often are the same;" and he fell into the mud.

"It is not comfortable here," he remarked, "but no doubt it is some fashionable watering-place, and they have sent me away to recruit my health. My nerves are certainly very much shattered, and I require rest."

Then a little Frog, with bright jewelled eyes, and a green mottled coat, swam up to him.

"A new arrival, I see!" said the Frog. "Well, after all there is nothing like mud. Give me rainy weather and a ditch, and I am quite happy. Do you think it will be a wet afternoon? I am sure I hope so, but the sky is quite blue and cloudless. What a pity!"

"Ahem! ahem!" said the Rocket, and he began to cough.

"What a delightful voice you have!" cried the Frog. "Really it is quite like a croak, and croaking is of course the most musical sound in the world. You will hear our glee-club this evening. We sit in the old duck-pond close by the farmer's house, and as soon as the moon rises we begin. It is so entrancing that everybody lies awake to listen to us. In fact, it was only yesterday that I heard the farmer's wife say to her mother that she could not get a wink of sleep at night on account of us. It is most gratifying to find oneself so popular."

"Ahem! ahem!" said the Rocket angrily. He was very much annoyed that he could not get a word in.

"A delightful voice, certainly," continued

the Frog; "I hope you will come over to the duck-pond. I am off to look for my daughters. I have six beautiful daughters, and I am so afraid the Pike may meet them. He is a perfect monster, and would have no hesitation in breakfasting off them. Well, good-bye: I have enjoyed our conversation very much, I assure you."

"Conversation, indeed!" said the Rocket. "You have talked the whole time yourself. That is not conversation."

"Somebody must listen," answered the Frog, "and I like to do all the talking myself. It saves time, and prevents arguments."

"But I like arguments," said the Rocket.

"I hope not," said the Frog complacently. "Arguments are extremely vulgar, for everybody in good society holds exactly the same opinions. Good-bye a second time; I see my daughters in the distance;" and the little Frog swam away.

"You are a very irritating person," said the Rocket, "and very ill-bred. I hate people who talk about themselves, as you do, when one wants to talk about oneself, as I do. It is what I call selfishness, and selfishness is a most detest-

able thing, especially to any one of my temperament, for I am well known for my sympathetic nature. In fact, you should take example by me, you could not possibly have a better model. Now that you have the chance you had better avail yourself of it, for I am going back to Court almost immediately. I am a great favourite at Court; in fact, the Prince and Princess were married yesterday in my honour. Of course you know nothing of these matters, for you are a provincial."

"There is no good talking to him," said a Dragon-fly, who was sitting on the top of a large brown bulrush; "no good at all, for he has gone away."

"Well, that is his loss, not mine," answered the Rocket. "I am not going to stop talking to him merely because he pays no attention. I like hearing myself talk. It is one of my greatest pleasures. I often have long conversations all by myself, and I am so clever that sometimes I don't understand a single word of what I am saying."

"Then you should certainly lecture on Philosophy," said the Dragon-fly; and he spread

a pair of lovely gauze wings and soared away into the sky.

"How very silly of him not to stay here!" said the Rocket. "I am sure that he has not often got such a chance of improving his mind. However, I don't care a bit. Genius like mine is sure to be appreciated some day;" and he sank down a little deeper into the mud.

After some time a large White Duck swam up to him. She had yellow legs, and webbed feet, and was considered a great beauty on account of her waddle.

"Quack, quack, quack," she said. "What a curious shape you are! May I ask were you born like that, or is it the result of an accident?"

"It is quite evident that you have always lived in the country," answered the Rocket, "otherwise you would know who I am. However, I excuse your ignorance. It would be unfair to expect other people to be as remarkable as oneself. You will no doubt be surprised to hear that I can fly up into the sky, and come down in a shower of golden rain."

"I don't think much of that," said the Duck, "as I cannot see what use it is to any one. Now, if you could plough the fields like the ox, or

draw a cart like the horse, or look after the sheep like the collie-dog, that would be something."

"My good creature," cried the Rocket in a very haughty tone of voice, "I see that you belong to the lower orders. A person of my position is never useful. We have certain accomplishments, and that is more than sufficient. I have no sympathy myself with industry of any kind, least of all with such industries as you seem to recommend. Indeed, I have always been of opinion that hard work is simply the refuge of people who have nothing whatever to do."

"Well, well," said the Duck, who was of a very peaceable disposition, and never quarrelled with any one, "everybody has different tastes. I hope, at any rate, that you are going to take up your residence here."

"Oh! dear no," cried the Rocket. "I am merely a visitor, a distinguished visitor. The fact is that I find this place rather tedious. There is neither society here, nor solitude. In fact, it is essentially suburban. I shall probably go back to Court, for I know that I am destined to make a sensation in the world."

"I had thoughts of entering public life once

myself,'' remarked the Duck; ''there are so many things that need reforming. Indeed, I took the chair at a meeting some time ago, and we passed resolutions condemning everything that we did not like. However, they did not seem to have much effect. Now I go in for domesticity, and look after my family.''

''I am made for public life,'' said the Rocket, ''and so are all my relations, even the humblest of them. Whenever we appear we excite great attention. I have not actually appeared myself, but when I do so it will be a magnificent sight. As for domesticity, it ages one rapidly, and distracts one's mind from higher things.''

''Ah! the higher things of life, how fine they are!'' said the Duck; ''and that reminds me how hungry I feel:'' and she swam away down the stream, saying, ''Quack, quack, quack.''

''Come back! come back!'' screamed the Rocket, ''I have a great deal to say to you;'' but the Duck paid no attention to him. ''I am glad that she has gone,'' he said to himself, ''she has a decidedly middle-class mind;'' and he sank a little deeper still into the mud, and began to think about the loneliness of genius, when suddenly two little boys in white smocks came

running down the bank, with a kettle and some faggots.

"This must be the deputation," said the Rocket, and he tried to look very dignified.

"Hallo!" cried one of the boys, "look at this old stick! I wonder how it came here;" and he picked the rocket out of the ditch.

"Old Stick!" said the Rocket, "impossible! Gold Stick, that is what he said, Gold Stick is very complimentary. In fact, he mistakes me for one of the Court dignitaries!"

"Let us put it into the fire!" said the other boy, "it will help to boil the kettle."

So they piled the faggots together, and put the Rocket on top, and lit the fire.

"This is magnificent," cried the Rocket, "they are going to let me off in broad daylight, so that every one can see me."

"We will go to sleep now," they said, "and when we wake up the kettle will be boiled;" and they lay down on the grass, and shut their eyes.

The Rocket was very damp, so he took a long time to burn. At last, however, the fire caught him.

"Now I am going off!" he cried, and he made himself very stiff and straight. "I know I shall

go much higher than the stars, much higher than the moon, much higher than the sun. In fact, I shall go so high that——"

Fizz! Fizz! Fizz! and he went straight up into the air.

"Delightful!" he cried, "I shall go on like this for ever. What a success I am!"

But nobody saw him.

Then he began to feel a curious tingling sensation all over him.

"Now I am going to explode," he cried. "I shall set the whole world on fire, and make such a noise, that nobody will talk about anything else for a whole year." And he certainly did explode. Bang! Bang! Bang! went the gunpowder. There was no doubt about it.

But nobody heard him, not even the two little boys, for they were sound asleep.

Then all that was left of him was the stick, and this fell down on the back of a Goose who was taking a walk by the side of the ditch.

"Good heavens!" cried the Goose. "It is going to rain sticks;" and she rushed into the water.

"I knew I should create a great sensation," gasped the Rocket, and he went out.

PART III

INTRODUCTION

By EDGAR SALTUS

The present volume is a protest against the commonplace, entered by a man who never made a commonplace remark. That is unusual and consequently offensive. To be commonplace is to be normal. Not to be commonplace is to be eccentric, which, being translated, means out of the ordinary, and that is precisely what the present volume is, precisely what its author was, who, in consequence was much disliked, yet only by those who did not know him.

A story is told that may be untrue and which, for that reason, is all the more interesting. Projected among a set of people who loathed the unusual, he was confronted by ice. A moment and the ice melted. A moment and those people were in fits. The story may not be true, but it might be. Oscar Wilde was the one man of his

day who could put and keep a London dinner party in a gale.

It was at Delmonico's that I first met him. His costume was romantically picturesque. Without, in the street, a crowd had collected. In the restaurant, people nudged and stared. Wilde was beautifully unmoved. He was talking, at first about nothing whatever, which is always a suggestive topic; then about *Vera,* a play of his, for which a local manager had offered him an advance, five thousand dollars if I remember rightly, mere starvation wages, as he expressed it, and he went on to say that the manager wanted him to make certain changes in it. Engagingly he enquired:— "But who am I to tamper with a masterpiece?"— a bit of nonsense, spontaneous, charming, irrefutable, as all nonsense should be, and as all his nonsense was.

Later, in London, I saw him again. The picturesque then had departed. The lilies, the long hair, the velvet, the knee-breeches, these things had gone. He was married, he was a father, and, in his dreary house in Tite Street, he resembled a guitar in a refrigerator. Of that he may have been conscious. I remember one of his children running to him and crying, "My

good papa!" and I remember Wilde taking the boy and patting him and saying, "Don't call me that, it sounds so respectable."

In Tite Street, at this time, and in Regent Street where he occasionally dined, he was gentle, wholesome, joyous, a man who paid compliments because, as he put it, he could pay nothing else. Meanwhile, in abandoning the picturesque, he had not assumed the drab. He always looked, what he was, a brilliant being. I have heard Frenchmen say that he had the air of a dentist. In Paris, that is—or was—the supreme reproach. Why, I have never understood. Such dentists as it has been my misfortune to encounter looked rather down in the mouth. Wilde was always laughing. He smiled and jested at poverty, as he smiled and jested at people who, of all people, smile and jest the least. "When I have to take a train," he told me, "I stand in the door of the railway carriage and smile. That is so alarming that people who might get in think me mad. They go away and I have the carriage to myself."

It may be that those whom he alarmed were not so much in error. It may be that Lyssa, goddess of the mad and the elect, fanned him with her harlequin wings, led him with her opal chains.

Mad men have merely a point of view that differs from our own, and his was always different. I remember complaining and very unphilosophically about somebody or other who had kept me waiting at an appointment where I had punctually presented myself, and I remember, too, how prompt and beautiful was his sympathy:—"Ah, yes! Punctuality is the thief of time." On heavy topics he preferred light views.

We were then in the chambers of Francis Hope who, at the moment, was interesting himself in the Stock Exchange. Some one else looked in, and Hope asked what was new in the City. "Money is very tight," came the reply. "Ah, yes!" Wilde exclaimed, "and of a tightness that is felt even in Tite Street. Believe me, I passed the forenoon at the British Museum looking at a gold-piece in a case."

Money, I suppose, is more or less necessary. Given enough of it, given also imagination, and it might even be useful. With gold and genius a new religion could be founded. Apart from that; apart, too, from possibilities not similar but cognate, money is a subject that poets avoid. Whenever Wilde mentioned it, and that was seldom, his attitude conveyed an unstudied re-

moteness. Personally, I have no lesson to bring, no moral to deduce, but the attitude seems more endearing than the local and commercial custom of translating everything into dollars and cents. In any event, the custom is not exactly witty, which is the reason, perhaps, why Wilde avoided it.

He avoided it as he avoided the banal. His table talk was a sleight-of-tongue. He played with ideas as you may have seen a juggler play with crystal balls. The same ease, the same brilliance. The brilliance delighted, but it did not weary, nor could it. He did not monologue, he did not monopolise. Your own remarks he caught and threw back enhanced.

In the circles known as occult, it is said that the devas converse in colours, and that those only may address them from whose speech all bitterness has gone. If any mortal ever could talk as the high gods do, it was Oscar Wilde. In his speech were rainbows. The most venomous thing I ever heard him say of anyone was about a royal duke, whom he described as a tedious person, and I never heard him utter a syllable that could not have been shrieked through a court ball.

Anything he said, even to a waiter in a restaurant, or to the cabby that brought him there, had

the charm of the unexpected. Lord of language he called himself, and so he was. He talked infinitely better than anyone else, but he talked, too, infinitely better than he wrote. In that, as was his custom, he reversed the order of things. However admirably a genius may write, usually his conversation is less delectable, though it may happen and has happened that what a genius writes is not so very intoxicating either.

One night I had supper with Wilde in the Regent Street restaurant, where—in connection with what I have forgotten—he spoke of Pheme, an enigmatic divinity who flashed through a verse of Hesiod and vanished behind a page of Herodotus. In speaking of her, abruptly his eyes lifted, his mouth contracted, a spasm of pain—or of dread—had gripped him. A moment only. His face relaxed. It had gone.

Pheme represented the message that the future sometimes sends and which we call premonition. Often I have since wondered whether the goddess appeared to him then and, in appearing, could have raised, however slightly, some fringe of the curtain behind which that panther, his destiny, crouched.

I had looked away. I looked again. Before

me was a pauper, fat, florid, overdressed, who, in a voice deeply Belgravian, was reciting the fantasies of the damned. In his hand was a manuscript and we were supping on *Salomé.*

As the courses proceeded, courses of which some, I could have sworn, had been truffled in Eblis, the mysterious divinity whom he may have evoked, designed perhaps to visit me, for, as I applauded, I shuddered and told him that I had.

"It is only the shudder that counts," he replied.

Yet the use he made of it was scant. He tried, I think, to put it in *Dorian Gray,* and I think, too, he failed. That curious story of curious crime, originally appeared in a local magazine. At the time, I was in New York. Shortly afterward, I was again in London where Wilde enquired about the editor. I replied that I supposed he was quite well.

He caught me up. "But this is incredible! When that story of yours which was so pernicious and so perfect"—occasionally it pleased Wilde to be sarcastic—"when that appeared, I heard that the editor was removed. When mine appeared, I thought he would be hanged. Now you tell me he is quite well. It is most affecting."

It was my turn to be sympathetic. "So is

Dorian Gray," I said. "But why was he cut by that Duke?"

He rose to it. "Well, you know, I fancy he saw him eating fish with a knife."

Barring Arvers, who wrote one sonnet and nothing else whatever, every modern writer has mistakes to his debit, and Wilde had his. Among them is *Dorian Gray*. It resembles a Roman coin on which the profile of the imperator is admirably executed, while the lettering is so carelessly effected, that you are forced to conjecture that the artist refused to bother with it. Perhaps Wilde would not bother either. On the other hand, the elect often write badly and so much the better for them. The art of the concise and canonical sentence, belongs either to the second rate or else to those who write, as Flaubert wrote, for the joy and the pain of it.

Wilde wrote for money. One evening he told how he had laboured that day.

"Before luncheon, I took a comma out. After luncheon I put the comma back."

Delightful nonsense. He worked hard and he worked in haste. Only in what he produced in jail, where no editor sat waiting, and in his plays, which he talked, do his works adequately reflect

him. Lord of language he was, but perhaps not always prince of prose. With added years and a fairer fate, that title also would have been accorded. Yet not for what death withheld, but for what life bestowed, he lies buried now, as in ancient days the elect were buried, "among the kings."

THE DECAY OF LYING

An Observation

A DIALOGUE

Persons: Cyril and Vivian. Scene: the library of a country house in Nottinghamshire.

THE DECAY OF LYING.

Cyril (*coming in through the open window from the terrace*). My dear Vivian, don't coop yourself up all day in the library. It is a perfectly lovely afternoon. The air is exquisite. There is a mist upon the woods, like the purple bloom upon a plum. Let us go and lie on the grass, and smoke cigarettes, and enjoy Nature.

Vivian. Enjoy Nature! I am glad to say that I have entirely lost that faculty. People tell us that Art makes us love Nature more than we loved her before; that it reveals her secrets to us; and that after a careful study of Corot and Constable we see things in her that had escaped our observation. My own experience is that the more we study Art, the less we care for Nature. What Art really reveals to us is Nature's lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition. Nature has good intentions, of course, but, as Aristotle once said,

she cannot carry them out. When I look at a landscape I cannot help seeing all its defects. It is fortunate for us, however, that Nature is so imperfect, as otherwise we should have had no art at all. Art is our spirited protest, our gallant attempt to teach Nature her proper place. As for the infinite variety of Nature, that is a pure myth. It is not to be found in Nature herself. It resides in the imagination, or fancy, or cultivated blindness of the man who looks at her.

Cyril. Well, you need not look at the landscape. You can lie on the grass and smoke and talk.

Vivian. But Nature is so uncomfortable. Grass is hard and lumpy and damp, and full of dreadful black insects. Why, even Morris' poorest workman could make you a more comfortable seat than the whole of Nature can. Nature pales before the furniture of "the street which from Oxford has borrowed its name," as the poet you love so much once vilely phrased it. I don't complain. If Nature had been comfortable, mankind would never have invented architecture, and I prefer houses to the open air. In a house we all feel of the proper proportions. Everything is subordinated to us, fashioned for our use and our pleasure. Egotism itself, which is so necessary to a proper sense

of human dignity, is entirely the result of indoor life. Out of doors one becomes abstract and impersonal. One's individuality absolutely leaves one. And then Nature is so indifferent, so unappreciative. Whenever I am walking in the park here I always feel that I am no more to her than the cattle that browse on the slope, or the burdock that blooms in the ditch. Nothing is more evident than that Nature hates Mind. Thinking is the most unhealthy thing in the world, and people die of it just as they die of any other disease. Fortunately, in England, at any rate, thought is not catching. Our splendid physique as a people is entirely due to our national stupidity. I only hope we shall be able to keep this great historic bulwark of our happiness for many years to come; but I am afraid that we are beginning to be over-educated; at least, everybody who is incapable of learning has taken to teaching—that is really what our enthusiasm for education has come to. In the meantime, you had better go back to your wearisome uncomfortable Nature, and leave me to correct my proofs.

Cyril. Writing an article! That is not very consistent after what you have just said.

Vivian. Who wants to be consistent? The dul-

lard and the doctrinaire, the tedious people who carry out their principles to the bitter end of action, to the *reductio ad absurdum* of practice. Not I. Like Emerson, I write over the door of my library the word "Whim." Besides, my article is really a most salutary and valuable warning. If it is attended to, there may be a new Renaissance of Art.

Cyril. What is the subject?

Vivian. I intend to call it "The Decay of Lying: A Protest."

Cyril. Lying! I should have thought that our politicians kept up that habit.

Vivian. I assure you that they do not. They never rise beyond the level of misrepresentation, and actually condescend to prove, to discuss, to argue. How different from the temper of the true liar, with his frank, fearless statements, his superb irresponsibility, his healthy, natural disdain of proof of any kind! After all, what is a fine lie? Simply that which is its own evidence. If a man is sufficiently unimaginative to produce evidence in support of a lie, he might just as well speak the truth at once. No, the politicians won't do. Something may, perhaps, be urged on behalf of the Bar. The mantle of the Sophist has fallen

on its members. Their feigned ardours and unreal rhetoric are delightful. They can make the worse appear the better cause, as though they were fresh from Leontine schools, and have been known to wrest from reluctant juries triumphant verdicts of acquittal for their clients, even when those clients, as often happens, were clearly and unmistakably innocent. But they are briefed by the prosaic, and are not ashamed to appeal to precedent. In spite of their endeavours, the truth will out. Newspapers, even, have degenerated. They may now be absolutely relied upon. One feels it as one wades through their columns. It is always the unreadable that occurs. I am afraid that there is not much to be said in favour of either the lawyer or the journalist. Besides, what I am pleading for is Lying in art. Shall I read you what I have written? It might do you a great deal of good.

Cyril. Certainly, if you give me a cigarette. Thanks. By the way, what magazine do you intend it for?

Vivian. For the *Retrospective Review.* I think I told you that the elect had revived it.

Cyril. Whom do you mean by "the elect"?

Vivian. Oh, The Tired Hedonists, of course.

It is a club to which I belong. We are supposed to wear faded roses in our button-holes when we meet, and to have a sort of cult for Domitian. I am afraid you are not eligible. You are too fond of simple pleasures.

Cyril. I should be black-balled on the ground of animal spirits, I suppose?

Vivian. Probably. Besides, you are a little too old. We don't admit anybody who is of the usual age.

Cyril. Well, I should fancy you are all a good deal bored with each other.

Vivian. We are. That is one of the objects of the club. Now, if you promise not to interrupt too often, I will read you my article.

Cyril. You will find me all attention.

Vivian (reading in a very clear, musical voice). "THE DECAY OF LYING: A PROTEST.—One of the chief causes that can be assigned for the curiously commonplace character of most of the literature of our age is undoubtedly the decay of Lying as an art, a science, and a social pleasure. The ancient historians gave us delightful fiction in the form of fact; the modern novelist presents us with dull facts under the guise of fiction. The Blue-Book is rapidly becoming his ideal both for method

and manner. He has his tedious *'document humain,'* his miserable little *'coin de la création,'* into which he peers with his microscope. He is to be found at the Librairie Nationale, or at the British Museum, shamelessly reading up his subject. He has not even the courage of other people's ideas, but insists on going directly to life for everything, and ultimately, between encyclopædias and personal experience, he comes to the ground, having drawn his types from the family circle or from the weekly washerwoman, and having acquired an amount of useful information from which never, even in his most meditative moments, can he thoroughly free himself.

"The loss that results to literature in general from this false ideal of our time can hardly be over-estimated. People have a careless way of talking about a 'born liar,' just as they talk about a 'born poet.' But in both cases they are wrong. Lying and poetry are arts—arts, as Plato saw, not unconnected with each other—and they require the most careful study, the most disinterested devotion. Indeed, they have their technique, just as the more material arts of painting and sculpture have, their subtle secrets of form and colour, their craft-mysteries, their deliberate artistic methods.

As one knows the poet by his fine music, so one can recognise the liar by his rich rhythmic utterance, and in neither case will the casual inspiration of the moment suffice. Here, as elsewhere, practice must precede perfection. But in modern days while the fashion of writing poetry has become far too common, and should, if possible, be discouraged, the fashion of lying has almost fallen into disrepute. Many a young man starts in life with a natural gift for exaggeration which, if nurtured in congenial and sympathetic surroundings, or by the imitation of the best models, might grow into something really great and wonderful. But, as a rule, he comes to nothing. He either falls into careless habits of accuracy——"

Cyril. My dear fellow!

Vivian. Please don't interrupt in the middle of a sentence. "He either falls into careless habits of accuracy, or takes to frequenting the society of the aged and the well-informed. Both things are equally fatal to his imagination, as indeed they would be fatal to the imagination of anybody, and in a short time he develops a morbid and unhealthy faculty of truth-telling, begins to verify all statements made in his presence, has no hesitation in contradicting people who are much

younger than himself, and often ends by writing novels which are so like life that no one can possibly believe in their probability. This is no isolated instance that we are giving. It is simply one example out of many; and if something cannot be done to check, or at least to modify, our monstrous worship of facts, Art will become sterile, and Beauty will pass away from the land.

"Even Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson, that delightful master of delicate and fanciful prose, is tainted with this modern vice, for we know positively no other name for it. There is such a thing as robbing a story of its reality by trying to make it too true, and *The Black Arrow* is so inartistic as not to contain a single anachronism to boast of, while the transformation of Dr. Jekyll reads dangerously like an experiment out of the *Lancet*. As for Mr. Rider Haggard, who really has, or had once, the makings of a perfectly magnificent liar, he is now so afraid of being suspected of genius that when he does tell us anything marvellous, he feels bound to invent a personal reminiscence, and to put it into a footnote as a kind of cowardly corroboration. Nor are our other novelists much better. Mr. Henry James writes fiction as if it were a painful duty, and wastes upon mean mo-

tives and imperceptible 'points of view' his neat literary style, his felicitous phrases, his swift and caustic satire. Mr. Hall Caine, it is true, aims at the grandiose, but then he writes at the top of his voice. He is so loud that one cannot hear what he says. Mr. James Payn is an adept in the art of concealing what is not worth finding. He hunts down the obvious with the enthusiasm of a short-sighted detective. As one turns over the pages, the suspense of the author becomes almost unbearable. The horses of Mr. William Black's phaeton do not soar towards the sun. They merely frighten the sky at evening into violent chromo-lithographic effects. On seeing them approach, the peasants take refuge in dialect. Mrs. Oliphant prattles pleasantly about curates, lawn-tennis parties, domesticity, and other wearisome things. Mr. Marion Crawford has immolated himself upon the altar of local colour. He is like the lady in the French comedy who talks about 'le beau ciel d'Italie.' Besides, he has fallen into a bad habit of uttering moral platitudes. He is always telling us that to be good is to be good, and that to be bad is to be wicked. At times he is almost edifying. *Robert Elsmere* is, of course, a masterpiece—a masterpiece of the 'genre ennuyeux,' the one form

of literature that the English people seem to thoroughly enjoy. A thoughtful young friend of ours once told us that it reminded him of the sort of conversation that goes on at a meat tea in the house of a serious Nonconformist family, and we can quite believe it. Indeed it is only in England that such a book could be produced. England is the home of lost ideas. As for that great and daily increasing school of novelists for whom the sun always rises in the East-End, the only thing that can be said about them is that they find life crude, and leave it raw.

"In France, though nothing so deliberately tedious as *Robert Elsmere* has been produced, things are not much better. M. Guy de Maupassant, with his keen mordant irony and his hard vivid style, strips life of the few poor rags that still cover her, and shows us foul sore and festering wounds. He writes lurid little tragedies in which everybody is ridiculous; bitter comedies at which one cannot laugh for very tears. M. Zola, true to the lofty principle that he lays down in one of his pronunciamientos on literature, 'L'homme de génie n'a jamais d'esprit,' is determined to show that, if he has not got genius, he can at least be dull. And how well he succeeds! He is not without power.

Indeed at times, as in *Germinal,* there is something almost epic in his work. But his work is entirely wrong from beginning to end, and wrong not on the ground of morals, but on the ground of art. From any ethical standpoint it is just what it should be. The author is perfectly truthful and describes things exactly as they happen. What more can any moralist desire? We have no sympathy at all with the moral indignation of our time against M. Zola. It is simply the indignation of Tartuffe on being exposed. But from the standpoint of art, what can be said in favour of the author of *L'Assommoir, Nana,* and *Pot-Bouille?* Nothing. Mr. Ruskin once described the characters in George Eliot's novels as being like the sweepings of a Pentonville omnibus, but M. Zola's characters are much worse. They have their dreary vices, and their drearier virtues. The record of their lives is absolutely without interest. Who cares what happens to them? In literature we require distinction, charm, beauty, and imaginative power. We don't want to be harrowed and disgusted with an account of the doings of the lower orders. M. Daudet is better. He has wit, a light touch, and an amusing style. But he has lately committed literary suicide. Nobody can possibly care for

Delobelle with his 'Il faut lutter pour l'art,' or for Valmajour with his eternal refrain about the nightingale, or for the poet in *Jack* with his 'mots cruels,' now that we have learned from *Vingt Ans de ma Vie littéraire* that these characters were taken directly from life. To us they seem to have suddenly lost all their vitality, all the few qualities they ever possessed. The only real people are the people who never existed, and if a novelist is base enough to go to life for his personages he should at least pretend that they are creations, and not boast of them as copies. The justification of a character in a novel is not that other persons are what they are, but that the author is what he is. Otherwise the novel is not a work of art. As for M. Paul Bourget, the master of the *roman psychologique,* he commits the error of imagining that the men and women of modern life are capable of being infinitely analysed for an innumerable series of chapters. In point of fact, what is interesting about people in good society—and M. Bourget rarely moves out of the Faubourg St. Germain, except to come to London—is the mask that each one of them wears, not the reality that lies behind the mask. It is a humiliating confession, but we are all of us made out of the same stuff. In Falstaff

there is something of Hamlet, in Hamlet there is not a little of Falstaff. The fat knight has his moods of melancholy, and the young prince his moments of coarse humour. Where we differ from each other is purely in accidentals: in personal appearance, tricks of habit, and the like. The more one analyses people, the more all reasons for analysis disappear. Sooner or later one comes to that dreadful universal thing called human nature. Indeed, as any one who has ever worked among the poor knows only too well, the brotherhood of man is no mere poet's dream, it is a most depressing and humiliating reality; and if a writer insists upon analysing the upper classes, he might just as well write of match-girls and costermongers at once." However, my dear Cyril, I will not detain you any further just here. I quite admit that modern novels have many good points. All I insist on is that, as a class, they are quite unreadable.

Cyril. That is certainly a very grave qualification, but I must say that I think you are rather unfair in some of your strictures. I like *The Deemster,* and *The Daughter of Heth*, and *Le Disciple,* and *Mr. Isaacs,* and as for *Robert Elsmere,* I am quite devoted to it. Not that I can look upon it as a serious work. As a statement of the

problems that confront the earnest Christian it is ridiculous and antiquated. It is simply Arnold's *Literature and Dogma* with the literature left out. It is as much behind the age as Paley's *Evidences*, or Colenso's method of Biblical exegesis. Nor could anything be less impressive than the unfortunate hero gravely heralding a dawn that rose long ago, and so completely missing its true significance that he proposes to carry on the business of the old firm under the new name. On the other hand, it contains several clever caricatures, and a heap of delightful quotations, and Green's philosophy very plentifully sugars the somewhat bitter pill of the author's fiction. I also cannot help expressing my surprise that you have said nothing about the two novelists whom you are always reading, Balzac and George Meredith. Surely they are realists, both of them?

Vivian. Ah! Meredith! Who can define him? His style is chaos illumined by flashes of lightning. As a writer he has mastered everything except language: as a novelist he can do everything, except tell a story: as an artist he is everything, except articulate. Somebody in Shakespeare—Touchstone, I think—talks about a man who is always breaking his shins over his own wit, and it seems

to me that this might serve as a basis for a criticism of Meredith's method. But whatever he is, he is not a realist. Or, rather, I would say that he is a child of realism who is not on speaking terms with his father. By deliberate choice he has made himself a romanticist. He has refused to bow the knee to Baal, and after all, even if the man's fine spirit did not revolt against the noisy assertions of realism, his style would be quite sufficient of itself to keep life at a respectful distance. By its means he has planted round his garden a hedge full of thorns, and red with wonderful roses. As for Balzac, he was a most remarkable combination of the artistic temperament with the scientific spirit. The latter he bequeathed to his disciples: the former was entirely his own. The difference between such a book as M. Zola's *L'Assommoir* and Balzac's *Illusions Perdues* is the difference between unimaginative realism and imaginative reality. "All Balzac's characters," said Baudelaire, "are gifted with the same ardour of life that animated himself. All his fictions are as deeply coloured as dreams. Each mind is a weapon loaded to the muzzle with will. The very scullions have genius." A steady course of Balzac reduces our living friends to shadows, and our acquaintances to the

shadows of shades. His characters have a kind of fervent fiery-coloured existence. They dominate us, and defy scepticism. One of the greatest tragedies of my life is the death of Lucien de Rubempré. It is a grief from which I have never been able to completely rid myself. It haunts me in my moments of pleasure. I remember it when I laugh. But Balzac is no more a realist than Holbein was. He created life, he did not copy it. I admit, however, that he set far too high a value on modernity of form, and that, consequently, there is no book of his that, as an artistic masterpiece, can rank with *Salammbô* or *Esmond,* or *The Cloister and the Hearth,* or the *Vicomte de Bragelonne.*

Cyril. Do you object to modernity of form, then?

Vivian. Yes. It is a huge price to pay for a very poor result. Pure modernity of form is always somewhat vulgarising. It cannot help being so. The public imagine that, because they are interested in their immediate surroundings, Art should be interested in them also, and should take them as her subject-matter. But the mere fact that they are interested in these things makes them unsuitable subjects for Art. The only beautiful things, as somebody once said, are the things that

do not concern us. As long as a thing is useful or necessary to us, or affects us in any way, either for pain or for pleasure, or appeals strongly to our sympathies, or is a vital part of the environment in which we live, it is outside the proper sphere of art. To art's subject-matter we should be more or less indifferent. We should, at any rate, have no preferences, no prejudices, no partisan feelings of any kind. It is exactly because Hecuba is nothing to us that her sorrows are such an admirable motive for tragedy. I do not know anything in the whole history of literature sadder than the artistic career of Charles Reade. He wrote one beautiful book, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, a book as much above *Romola* as *Romola* is above *Daniel Deronda*, and wasted the rest of his life in a foolish attempt to be modern, to draw public attention to the state of our convict prisons, and the management of our private lunatic asylums. Charles Dickens was depressing enough in all conscience when he tried to arouse our sympathy for the victims of the poor-law administration; but Charles Reade, an artist, a scholar, a man with a true sense of beauty, raging and roaring over the abuses of contemporary life like a common pamphleteer or a sensational journalist,

is really a sight for the angels to weep over. Believe me, my dear Cyril, modernity of form and modernity of subject-matter are entirely and absolutely wrong. We have mistaken the common livery of the age for the vesture of the Muses, and spend our days in the sordid streets and hideous suburbs of our vile cities when we should be out on the hillside with Apollo. Certainly we are a degraded race, and have sold our birthright for a mess of facts.

Cyril. There is something in what you say, and there is no doubt that whatever amusement we may find in reading a purely modern novel, we have rarely any artistic pleasure in re-reading it. And this is perhaps the best rough test of what is literature and what is not. If one cannot enjoy reading a book over and over again, there is no use reading it at all. But what do you say about the return to Life and Nature? This is the panacea that is always being recommended to us.

Vivian. I will read you what I say on that subject. The passage comes later on in the article, but I may as well give it to you now:—

"The popular cry of our time is 'Let us return to Life and Nature; they will recreate Art for us, and send the red blood coursing through her veins;

they will shoe her feet with swiftness and make her hand strong.' But, alas! we are mistaken in our amiable and well-meaning efforts. Nature is always behind the age. And as for Life, she is the solvent that breaks up Art, the enemy that lays waste her house."

Cyril. What do you mean by saying that Nature is always behind the age?

Vivian. Well, perhaps that is rather cryptic. What I mean is this. If we take Nature to mean natural simple instinct as opposed to self-conscious culture, the work produced under this influence is always old-fashioned, antiquated, and out of date. One touch of Nature may make the whole world kin, but two touches of Nature will destroy any work of Art. If, on the other hand, we regard Nature as the collection of phenomena external to man, people only discover in her what they bring to her. She has no suggestions of her own. Wordsworth went to the lakes, but he was never a lake poet. He found in stones the sermons he had already hidden there. He went moralising about the district, but his good work was produced when he returned, not to Nature but to poetry. Poetry gave him "Laodamia," and the fine sonnets, and the great Ode, such as it is. Nature gave

him "Martha Ray" and "Peter Bell," and the address to Mr. Wilkinson's spade.

Cyril. I think that view might be questioned. I am rather inclined to believe in the "impulse from a vernal wood," though, of course, the artistic value of such an impulse depends entirely on the kind of temperament that receives it, so that the return to Nature would come to mean simply the advance to a great personality. You would agree with that, I fancy. However, proceed with your article.

Vivian (*reading*). "Art begins with abstract decoration, with purely imaginative and pleasurable work dealing with what is unreal and non-existent. This is the first stage. Then Life becomes fascinated with this new wonder, and asks to be admitted into the charmed circle. Art takes life as part of her rough material, recreates it, and refashions it in fresh forms, is absolutely indifferent to fact, invents, imagines, dreams, and keeps between herself and reality the impenetrable barrier of beautiful style, of decorative or ideal treatment. The third stage is when Life gets the upper hand, and drives Art out into the wilderness. This is the true decadence, and it is from this that we are now suffering.

"Take the case of the English drama. At first in the hands of the monks Dramatic Art was abstract, decorative, and mythological. Then she enlisted Life in her service, and using some of life's external forms, she created an entirely new race of beings, whose sorrows were more terrible than any sorrow man has ever felt, whose joys were keener than lover's joys, who had the rage of the Titans and the calm of the gods, who had monstrous and marvellous sins, monstrous and marvellous virtues. To them she gave a language different from that of actual use, a language full of resonant music and sweet rhythm, made stately by solemn cadence, or made delicate by fanciful rhyme, jewelled with wonderful words, and enriched with lofty diction. She clothed her children in strange raiment and gave them masks, and at her bidding the antique world rose from its marble tomb. A new Cæsar stalked through the streets of risen Rome, and with purple sail and flute-led oars another Cleopatra passed up the river to Antioch. Old myth and legend and dream took shape and substance. History was entirely rewritten, and there was hardly one of the dramatists who did not recognise that the object of Art is not simple truth but complex beauty. In this

they were perfectly right. Art itself is really a form of exaggeration; and selection, which is the very spirit of art, is nothing more than an intensified mode of over-emphasis.

"But Life soon shattered the perfection of the form. Even in Shakespeare we can see the beginning of the end. It shows itself by the gradual breaking up of the blank-verse in the later plays, by the predominance given to prose, and by the over-importance assigned to characterisation. The passages in Shakespeare—and they are many—where the language is uncouth, vulgar, exaggerated, fantastic, obscene even, are entirely due to Life calling for an echo of her own voice, and rejecting the intervention of beautiful style, through which alone should Life be suffered to find expression. Shakespeare is not by any means a flawless artist. He is too fond of going directly to life, and borrowing life's natural utterance. He forgets that when Art surrenders her imaginative medium she surrenders everything. Goethe says, somewhere—

In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister.

'It is in working within limits that the master reveals himself,' and the limitation, the very condi-

tion of any art is style. However, we need not linger any longer over Shakespeare's realism. *The Tempest* is the most perfect of palinodes. All that we desired to point out was, that the magnificent work of the Elizabethan and Jacobean artists contained within itself the seeds of its own dissolution, and that, if it drew some of its strength from using life as a rough material, it drew all its weakness from using life as an artistic method. As the inevitable result of this substitution of an imitative for a creative medium, this surrender of an imaginative form, we have the modern English melodrama. The characters in these plays talk on the stage exactly as they would talk off it; they have neither aspirations nor aspirates; they are taken directly from life and reproduce its vulgarity down to the smallest detail; they present the gait, manner, costume, and accent of real people; they would pass unnoticed in a third-class railway carriage. And yet how wearisome the plays are! They do not succeed in producing even that impression of reality at which they aim, and which is their only reason for existing. As a method, realism is a complete failure.

"What is true about the drama and the novel is no less true about those arts that we call the deco-

rative arts. The whole history of these arts in Europe is the record of the struggle between Orientalism, with its frank rejection of imitation, its love of artistic convention, its dislike to the actual representation of any object in Nature, and our own imitative spirit. Wherever the former has been paramount, as in Byzantium, Sicily, and Spain, by actual contact, or in the rest of Europe by the influence of the Crusades, we have had beautiful and imaginative work in which the visible things of life are transmuted into artistic conventions, and the things that Life has not are invented and fashioned for her delight. But wherever we have returned to Life and Nature, our work has always become vulgar, common, and uninteresting. Modern tapestry, with its aërial effects, its elaborate perspective, its broad expanses of waste sky, its faithful and laborious realism, has no beauty whatsoever. The pictorial glass of Germany is absolutely detestable. We are beginning to weave possible carpets in England, but only because we have returned to the method and spirit of the East. Our rugs and carpets of twenty years ago, with their solemn depressing truths, their inane worship of Nature, their sordid reproductions of visible objects, have become, even to the Philistine, a

source of laughter. A cultured Mahomedan once remarked to us, 'You Christians are so occupied in misinterpreting the fourth commandment that you have never thought of making an artistic application of the second.' He was perfectly right, and the whole truth of the matter is this: The proper school to learn art in is not Life but Art."

And now let me read you a passage which seems to me to settle the question very completely:

"It was not always thus. We need not say anything about the poets, for they, with the unfortunate exception of Mr. Wordsworth, have been really faithful to their high mission, and are universally recognised as being absolutely unreliable. But in the works of Herodotus, who, in spite of the shallow and ungenerous attempts of modern sciolists to verify his history, may justly be called the 'Father of Lies'; in the published speeches of Cicero and the biographies of Suetonius; in Tacitus at his best; in Pliny's *Natural History;* in Hanno's *Periplus;* in all the early chronicles; in the Lives of the Saints; in Froissart and Sir Thomas Malory; in the travels of Marco Polo; in Olaus Magnus, and Aldrovandus, and Conrad Lycosthenes, with his magnificent *Prodigiorum et Ostentorum Chronicon;* in the autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini;

in the memoirs of Casanova; in Defoe's *History of the Plague;* in Boswell's *Life of Johnson;* in Napoleon's despatches, and in the works of our own Carlyle, whose *French Revolution* is one of the most fascinating historical novels ever written, facts are either kept in their proper subordinate position, or else entirely excluded on the general ground of dulness. Now, everything is changed. Facts are not merely finding a footing-place in history, but they are usurping the domain of Fancy, and have invaded the kingdom of Romance. Their chilling touch is over everything. They are vulgarising mankind. The crude commercialism of America, its materialising spirit, its indifference to the poetical side of things, and its lack of imagination and of high unattainable ideals, are entirely due to that country having adopted for its national hero a man, who, according to his own confession, was incapable of telling a lie, and it is not too much to say that the story of George Washington and the cherry-tree has done more harm, and in a shorter space of time, than any other moral tale in the whole of literature."

Cyril. My dear boy!

Vivian. I assure you it is the case, and the amusing part of the whole thing is that the story of the

cherry-tree is an absolute myth. However, you must not think that I am too despondent about the artistic future either of America or of our own country. Listen to this:—

"That some change will take place before this century has drawn to its close we have no doubt whatsoever. Bored by the tedious and improving conversation of those who have neither the wit to exaggerate nor the genius to romance, tired of the intelligent person whose reminiscences are always based upon memory, whose statements are invariably limited by probability, and who is at any time liable to be corroborated by the merest Philistine who happens to be present, Society sooner or later must return to its lost leader, the cultured and fascinating liar. Who he was who first, without ever having gone out to the rude chase, told the wondering cavemen at sunset how he had dragged the Megatherium from the purple darkness of its jasper cave, or slain the Mammoth in single combat and brought back its gilded tusks, we cannot tell, and not one of our modern anthropologists, for all their much-boasted science, has had the ordinary courage to tell us. Whatever was his name or race, he certainly was the true founder of social intercourse. For the aim of the liar is simply to charm,

to delight, to give pleasure. He is the very basis of civilised society, and without him a dinner party, even at the mansions of the great, is as dull as a lecture at the Royal Society, or a debate at the Incorporated Authors, or one of Mr. Burnand's farcical comedies.

"Nor will he be welcomed by society alone. Art, breaking from the prison-house of realism, will run to greet him, and will kiss his false, beautiful lips, knowing that he alone is in possession of the great secret of all her manifestations, the secret that Truth is entirely and absolutely a matter of style; while Life—poor, probable, uninteresting human life—tired of repeating herself for the benefit of Mr. Herbert Spencer, scientific historians, and the compilers of statistics in general, will follow meekly after him, and try to reproduce, in her own simple and untutored way, some of the marvels of which he talks.

"No doubt there will always be critics who, like a certain writer in the *Saturday Review,* will gravely censure the teller of fairy tales for his defective knowledge of natural history, who will measure imaginative work by their own lack of any imaginative faculty, and will hold up their inkstained hands in horror if some honest gentle-

man, who has never been farther than the yew-trees of his own garden, pens a fascinating book of travels like Sir John Mandeville, or, like great Raleigh, writes a whole history of the world, without knowing anything whatsoever about the past. To excuse themselves they will try and shelter under the shield of him who made Prospero the magician, and gave him Caliban and Ariel as his servants, who heard the Tritons blowing their horns round the coral reefs of the Enchanted Isle, and the fairies singing to each other in a wood near Athens, who led the phantom kings in dim procession across the misty Scottish heath, and hid Hecate in a cave with the weird sisters. They will call upon Shakespeare—they always do—and will quote that hackneyed passage about Art holding the mirror up to Nature, forgetting that this unfortunate aphorism is deliberately said by Hamlet in order to convince the bystanders of his absolute insanity in all art-matters."

Cyril. Ahem! Another cigarette, please.

Vivian. My dear fellow, whatever you may say, it is merely a dramatic utterance, and no more represents Shakespeare's real views upon art than the speeches of Iago represent his real views upon morals. But let me get to the end of the passage:

"Art finds her own perfection within, and not outside of, herself. She is not to be judged by any external standard of resemblance. She is a veil, rather than a mirror. She has flowers that no forests know of, birds that no woodland possesses. She makes and unmakes many worlds, and can draw the moon from heaven with a scarlet thread. Hers are the 'forms more real than living man,' and hers the great archetypes of which things that have existence are but unfinished copies. Nature has, in her eyes, no laws, no uniformity. She can work miracles at her will, and when she calls monsters from the deep they come. She can bid the almond tree blossom in winter, and send the snow upon the ripe cornfield. At her word the frost lays its silver finger on the burning mouth of June, and the winged lions creep out from the hollows of the Lydian hills. The dryads peer from the thicket as she passes by, and the brown fauns smile strangely at her when she comes near them. She has hawk-faced gods that worship her, and the centaurs gallop at her side."

Cyril. I like that. I can see it. Is that the end?

Vivian. No. There is one more passage, but it is purely practical. It simply suggests some methods by which we could revive this lost art of Lying.

Cyril. Well, before you read it to me, I should like to ask you a question. What do you mean by saying that life, "poor, probable, uninteresting human life," will try to reproduce the marvels of art? I can quite understand your objection to art being treated as a mirror. You think it would reduce genius to the position of a cracked looking-glass. But you don't mean to say that you seriously believe that Life imitates Art, that Life in fact is the mirror, and Art the reality?

Vivian. Certainly I do. Paradox though it may seem—and paradoxes are always dangerous things—it is none the less true that Life imitates art far more than Art imitates life. We have all seen in our own day in England how a certain curious and fascinating type of beauty, invented and emphasised by two imaginative painters, has so influenced Life that whenever one goes to a private view or to an artistic salon one sees, here the mystic eyes of Rossetti's dream, the long ivory throat, the strange square-cut jaw, the loosened shadowy hair that he so ardently loved, there the sweet maidenhood of "The Golden Stair," the blossom-like mouth and weary loveliness of the "Laus Amoris," the passion-pale face of Andromeda, the thin hands and lithe beauty of the Vivien in "Mer-

lin's Dream." And it has always been so. A great artist invents a type, and Life tries to copy it, to reproduce it in a popular form, like an enterprising publisher. Neither Holbein nor Vandyck found in England what they have given us. They brought their types with them, and Life with her keen imitative faculty set herself to supply the master with models. The Greeks, with their quick artistic instinct, understood this, and set in the bride's chamber the statue of Hermes or of Apollo, that she might bear children as lovely as the works of art that she looked at in her rapture or her pain. They knew that Life gains from Art not merely spirituality, depth of thought and feeling, soul-turmoil or soul-peace, but that she can form herself on the very lines and colours of art, and can reproduce the dignity of Phidias as well as the grace of Praxiteles. Hence came their objection to realism. They disliked it on purely social grounds. They felt that it inevitably makes people ugly, and they were perfectly right. We try to improve the conditions of the race by means of good air, free sunlight, wholesome water, and hideous bare buildings for the better housing of the lower orders. But these things merely produce health, they do not produce beauty. For this, Art is required,

and the true disciples of the great artist are not his studio-imitators, but those who become like his works of art, be they plastic as in Greek days, or pictorial as in modern times; in a word, Life is Art's best, Art's only pupil.

As it is with the visible arts, so it is with literature. The most obvious and the vulgarest form in which this is shown is in the case of the silly boys who, after reading the adventures of Jack Sheppard or Dick Turpin, pillage the stalls of unfortunate apple-women, break into sweet-shops at night, and alarm old gentlemen who are returning home from the city by leaping out on them in suburban lanes, with black masks and unloaded revolvers. This interesting phenomenon, which always occurs after the appearance of a new edition of either of the books I have alluded to, is usually attributed to the influence of literature on the imagination. But this is a mistake. The imagination is essentially creative and always seeks for a new form. The boy-burglar is simply the inevitable result of life's imitative instinct. He is Fact, occupied as Fact usually is, with trying to reproduce Fiction, and what we see in him is repeated on an extended scale throughout the whole of life. Schopenhauer has analysed the pessimism that

characterises modern thought, but Hamlet invented it. The world has become sad because a puppet was once melancholy. The Nihilist, that strange martyr who has no faith, who goes to the stake without enthusiasm, and dies for what he does not believe in, is a purely literary product. He was invented by Tourgénieff, and completed by Dostoieffski. Robespierre came out of the pages of Rousseau as surely as the People's Palace rose out of the *débris* of a novel. Literature always anticipates life. It does not copy it, but moulds it to its purpose. The nineteenth century, as we know it, is largely an invention of Balzac. Our Luciens de Rubempré, our Rastignacs, and de Marsays made their first appearance on the stage of the *Comédie Humaine*. We are merely carrying out, with footnotes and unnecessary additions, the whim or fancy or creative vision of a great novelist. I once asked a lady, who knew Thackeray intimately, whether he had had any model for Becky Sharp. She told me that Becky was an invention, but that the idea of the character had been partly suggested by a governess who lived in the neighbourhood of Kensington Square, and was the companion of a very selfish and rich old woman. I inquired what became of the governess, and she replied that, oddly

enough, some years after the appearance of *Vanity Fair,* she ran away with the nephew of the lady with whom she was living, and for a short time made a great splash in society, quite in Mrs. Rawdon Crawley's style, and entirely by Mrs. Rawdon Crawley's methods. Ultimately she came to grief, disappeared to the Continent, and used to be occasionally seen at Monte Carlo and other gambling places. The noble gentleman from whom the same great sentimentalist drew Colonel Newcome died, a few months after *The Newcomes* had reached a fourth edition, with the word "Adsum" on his lips. Shortly after Mr. Stevenson published his curious psychological story of transformation, a friend of mine, called Mr. Hyde, was in the north of London, and being anxious to get to a railway station, took what he thought would be a short cut, lost his way, and found himself in a network of mean, evil-looking streets. Feeling rather nervous, he began to walk extremely fast, when suddenly out of an archway ran a child right between his legs. It fell on the pavement, he tripped over it, and trampled upon it. Being of course very much frightened and a little hurt, it began to scream, and in a few seconds the whole street was full of rough people who came pouring out of the houses like

ants. They surrounded him and asked him his name. He was just about to give it when he suddenly remembered the opening incident in Mr. Stevenson's story. He was so filled with horror at having realised in his own person that terrible and well-written scene, and at having done accidentally, though in fact, what the Mr. Hyde of fiction had done with deliberate intent, that he ran away as hard as he could go. He was, however, very closely followed, and finally he took refuge in a surgery, the door of which happened to be open, where he explained to a young assistant, who happened to be there, exactly what had occurred. The humanitarian crowd were induced to go away on his giving them a small sum of money, and as soon as the coast was clear he left. As he passed out, the name on the brass door-plate of the surgery caught his eye. It was "Jekyll." At least it should have been.

Here the imitation, as far as it went, was of course accidental. In the following case the imitation was self-conscious: In the year 1879, just after I had left Oxford, I met at a reception at the house of one of the Foreign Ministers a woman of very curious exotic beauty. We became great friends, and were constantly together. And yet

what interested me most in her was not her beauty, but her character, her entire vagueness of character. She seemed to have no personality at all, but simply the possibility of many types. Sometimes she would give herself up entirely to art, turn her drawing-room into a studio, and spend two or three days a week at picture-galleries or museums. Then she would take to attending race-meetings, wear the most horsey clothes, and talk about nothing but betting. She abandoned religion for mesmerism, mesmerism for politics, and politics for the melodramatic excitements of philanthropy. In fact, she was a kind of Proteus, and as much a failure in all her transformations as was that wondrous sea-god when Odysseus laid hold of him. One day a serial began in one of the French magazines. At that time I used to read serial stories, and I well remember the shock of surprise I felt when I came to the description of the heroine. She was so like my friend that I brought her the magazine, and she recognised herself in it immediately, and seemed fascinated by the resemblance. I should tell you, by the way, that the story was translated from some dead Russian writer, so that the author had not taken his type from my friend. Well, to put the matter briefly, some months after-

wards I was in Venice, and finding the magazine in the reading-room of the hotel, I took it up casually to see what had become of the heroine. It was a most piteous tale, as the girl had ended by running away with a man absolutely inferior to her, not merely in social station, but in character and intellect also. I wrote to my friend that evening about my views on John Bellini, and the admirable ices at Florio's, and the artistic value of gondolas, but added a postscript to the effect that her double in the story had behaved in a very silly manner. I don't know why I added that, but I remember I had a sort of dread over me that she might do the same thing. Before my letter had reached her, she had run away with a man who deserted her in six months. I saw her in 1884 in Paris, where she was living with her mother, and I asked her whether the story had had anything to do with her action. She told me that she had felt an absolutely irresistible impulse to follow the heroine step by step in her strange and fatal progress, and that it was with a feeling of real terror that she had looked forward to the last few chapters of the story. When they appeared, it seemed to her that she was compelled to reproduce them in life, and she did so. It was a most clear

example of this imitative instinct of which I was speaking, and an extremely tragic one.

However, I do not wish to dwell any further upon individual instances. Personal experience is a most vicious and limited circle. All that I desire to point out is the general principle that Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life, and I feel sure that if you think seriously about it you will find that it is true. Life holds the mirror up to Art, and either reproduces some strange type imagined by painter or sculptor, or realises in fact what has been dreamed in fiction. Scientifically speaking, the basis of life—the energy of life, as Aristotle would call it—is simply the desire for expression, and Art is always presenting various forms through which this expression can be attained. Life seizes on them and uses them, even if they be to her own hurt. Young men have committed suicide because Rolla did so, have died by their own hand because by his own hand Werther died. Think of what we owe to the imitation of Christ, of what we owe to the imitation of Cæsar.

Cyril. The theory is certainly a very curious one, but to make it complete you must show that Nature, no less than Life, is an imitation of Art. Are you prepared to prove that?

Vivian. My dear fellow, I am prepared to prove anything.

Cyril. Nature follows the landscape painter then, and takes her effects from him?

Vivian. Certainly. Where, if not from the Impressionists, do we get those wonderful brown fogs that come creeping down our streets, blurring the gas-lamps and changing the houses into monstrous shadows? To whom, if not to them and their master, do we owe the lovely silver mists that brood over our river, and turn to faint forms of fading grace, curved bridge and swaying barge? The extraordinary change that has taken place in the climate of London during the last ten years is entirely due to this particular school of Art. You smile. Consider the matter from a scientific or a metaphysical point of view, and you will find that I am right. For what is Nature? Nature is no great mother who has borne us. She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life. Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty. Then, and then only, does it come into existence. At present, people

see fogs, not because there are fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects. There may have been fogs for centuries in London. I dare say there were. But no one saw them, and so we do not know anything about them. They did not exist till Art had invented them. Now, it must be admitted, fogs are carried to excess. They have become the mere mannerism of a clique, and the exaggerated realism of their method gives dull people bronchitis. Where the cultured catch an effect, the uncultured catch cold. And so, let us be humane, and invite Art to turn her wonderful eyes elsewhere. She has done so already, indeed. That white quivering sunlight that one sees now in France, with its strange blotches of mauve, and its restless violet shadows, is her latest fancy, and, on the whole, Nature reproduces it quite admirably. Where she used to give us Corots and Daubignys, she gives us now exquisite Monets and entrancing Pisaros. Indeed, there are moments, rare, it is true, but still to be observed from time to time, when Nature becomes absolutely modern. Of course she is not always to be relied upon. The fact is that she is in this unfortunate position: Art creates an incomparable and unique effect, and,

having done so, passes on to other things. Nature, upon the other hand, forgetting that imitation can be made the sincerest form of insult, keeps on repeating this effect until we all become absolutely wearied of it. Nobody of any real culture, for instance, ever talks nowadays about the beauty of a sunset. Sunsets are quite old-fashioned. They belong to the time when Turner was the last note in art. To admire them is a distinct sign of provincialism of temperament. Upon the other hand they go on. Yesterday evening Mrs. Arundel insisted on my going to the window, and looking at the glorious sky, as she called it. Of course I had to look at it. She is one of those absurdly pretty Philistines, to whom one can deny nothing. And what was it? It was simply a very second-rate Turner, a Turner of a bad period, with all the painter's worst faults exaggerated and overemphasised. Of course, I am quite ready to admit that Life very often commits the same error. She produces her false Renés and her sham Vautrins, just as Nature gives us, on one day a doubtful Cuyp, and on another a more than questionable Rousseau. Still, Nature irritates one more when she does things of that kind. It seems so stupid, so obvious, so unnecessary. A false Vautrin might

be delightful. A doubtful Cuyp is unbearable. However, I don't want to be too hard on Nature. I wish the Channel, especially at Hastings, did not look quite so often like a Henry Moore, grey pearl with yellow lights, but then, when Art is more varied, Nature will, no doubt, be more varied also. That she imitates Art, I don't think even her worst enemy would deny now. It is the one thing that keeps her in touch with civilised man. But have I proved my theory to your satisfaction?

Cyril. You have proved it to my dissatisfaction, which is better. But even admitting this strange imitative instinct in Life and Nature, surely you would acknowledge that Art expresses the temper of its age, the spirit of its time, the moral and social conditions that surround it, and under whose influence it is produced.

Vivian. Certainly not! Art never expresses anything but itself. This is the principle of my new æsthetics; and it is this, more than that vital connection between form and substance, on which Mr. Pater dwells, that makes music the type of all the arts. Of course, nations and individuals, with that healthy natural vanity which is the secret of existence, are always under the impression that it is of them that the Muses are talking, always try-

ing to find in the calm dignity of imaginative art some mirror of their own turbid passions, always forgetting that the singer of life is not Apollo, but Marsyas. Remote from reality, and with her eyes turned away from the shadows of the cave, Art reveals her own perfection, and the wondering crowd that watches the opening of the marvellous, many-petalled rose fancies that it is its own history that is being told to it, its own spirit that is finding expression in a new form. But it is not so. The highest art rejects the burden of the human spirit, and gains more from a new medium or a fresh material than she does from any enthusiasm for art, or from any great awakening of the human consciousness. She develops purely on her own lines. She is not symbolic of any age. It is the ages that are her symbols.

Even those who hold that Art is representative of time and place and people, cannot help admitting that the more imitative an art is, the less it represents to us the spirit of its age. The evil faces of the Roman emperors look out at us from the foul porphyry and spotted jasper in which the realistic artists of the day delighted to work, and we fancy that in those cruel lips and heavy sensual jaws we can find the secret of the ruin of the Em-

pire. But it was not so. The vices of Tiberius could not destroy that supreme civilisation, any more than the virtues of the Antonines could save it. It fell for other, for less interesting reasons. The sibyls and prophets of the Sistine may indeed serve to interpret for some that new birth of the emancipated spirit that we call the Renaissance; but what do the drunken boors and brawling peasants of Dutch art tell us about the great soul of Holland? The more abstract, the more ideal an art is, the more it reveals to us the temper of its age. If we wish to understand a nation by means of its art, let us look at its architecture or its music.

Cyril. I quite agree with you there. The spirit of an age may be best expressed in the abstract ideal arts, for the spirit itself is abstract and ideal. Upon the other hand, for the visible aspect of an age, for its look, as the phrase goes, we must, of course, go to the arts of imitation.

Vivian. I don't think so. After all, what the imitative arts really give us are merely the various styles of particular artists, or of certain schools of artists. Surely you don't imagine that the people of the Middle Ages bore any resemblance at all to the figures on mediæval stained glass, or in mediæ-

val stone and wood carving, or on mediæval metal-work, or tapestries, or illuminated MSS. They were probably very ordinary-looking people, with nothing grotesque, or remarkable, or fantastic in their appearance. The Middle Ages, as we know them in art, are simply a definite form of style, and there is no reason at all why an artist with this style should not be produced in the nineteenth century. No great artist ever sees things as they really are. If he did, he would cease to be an artist. Take an example from our own day. I know that you are fond of Japanese things. Now, do you really imagine that the Japanese people, as they are presented to us in art, have any existence? If you do, you have never understood Japanese art at all. The Japanese people are the deliberate self-conscious creation of certain individual artists. If you set a picture by Hokusai, or Hokkei, or any of the great native painters, beside a real Japanese gentleman or lady, you will see that there is not the slightest resemblance between them. The actual people who live in Japan are not unlike the general run of English people; that is to say, they are extremely commonplace, and have nothing curious or extraordinary about them. In fact the whole of Japan is a pure inven-

tion. There is no such country, there are no such people. One of our most charming painters went recently to the Land of the Chrysanthemum in the foolish hope of seeing the Japanese. All he saw, all he had the chance of painting, were a few lanterns and some fans. He was quite unable to discover the inhabitants, as his delightful exhibition at Messrs. Dowdeswell's Gallery showed only too well. He did not know that the Japanese people are, as I have said, simply a mode of style, an exquisite fancy of art. And so, if you desire to see a Japanese effect, you will not behave like a tourist and go to Tokio. On the contrary, you will stay at home, and steep yourself in the work of certain Japanese artists, and then, when you have absorbed the spirit of their style, and caught their imaginative manner of vision, you will go some afternoon and sit in the Park or stroll down Piccadilly, and if you cannot see an absolutely Japanese effect there, you will not see it anywhere. Or, to return again to the past, take as another instance the ancient Greeks. Do you think that Greek art ever tells us what the Greek people were like? Do you believe that the Athenian women were like the stately dignified figures of the Parthenon frieze, or like those marvellous goddesses who sat

in the triangular pediments of the same building? If you judge from the art, they certainly were so. But read an authority, like Aristophanes, for instance. You will find that the Athenian ladies laced tightly, wore high-heeled shoes, dyed their hair yellow, painted and rouged their faces, and were exactly like any silly fashionable or fallen creature of our own day. The fact is that we look back on the ages entirely through the medium of Art, and Art, very fortunately, has never once told us the truth.

Cyril. But modern portraits by English painters, what of them? Surely they are like the people they pretend to represent?

Vivian. Quite so. They are so like them that a hundred years from now no one will believe in them. The only portraits in which one believes are portraits where there is very little of the sitter and a very great deal of the artist. Holbein's drawings of the men and women of his time impress us with a sense of their absolute reality. But this is simply because Holbein compelled life to accept his conditions, to restrain itself within his limitations, to reproduce his type, and to appear as he wished it to appear. It is style that makes us believe in a thing—nothing but style. Most of

our modern portrait painters are doomed to absolute oblivion. They never paint what they see. They paint what the public sees, and the public never sees anything.

Cyril. Well, after that, I think I should like to hear the end of your article.

Vivian. With pleasure. Whether it will do any good, I really cannot say. Ours is certainly the dullest and most prosaic century possible. Why, even Sleep has played us false, and has closed up the gates of ivory, and opened the gates of horn. The dreams of the great middle classes of the country, as recorded in Mr. Myers's two bulky volumes on the subject, and in the Transactions of the Psychical Society, are the most depressing things that I have ever read. There is not even a fine nightmare among them. They are commonplace, sordid, and tedious. As for the Church, I cannot conceive anything better for the culture of a country than the presence in it of a body of men whose duty it is to believe in the supernatural, to perform daily miracles, and to keep alive that mythopœic faculty which is so essential for the imagination. But in the English Church a man succeeds, not through his capacity for belief, but through his capacity for disbelief. Ours is the only Church

where the sceptic stands at the altar, and where St. Thomas is regarded as the ideal apostle. Many a worthy clergyman, who passes his life in admirable works of kindly charity, lives and dies unnoticed and unknown; but it is sufficient for some shallow, uneducated passman out of either University to get up in his pulpit and express his doubts about Noah's Ark, or Balaam's ass, or Jonah and the whale, for half of London to flock to hear him, and to sit open-mouthed in rapt admiration at his superb intellect. The growth of common sense in the English Church is a thing very much to be regretted. It is really a degrading concession to a low form of realism. It is silly, too. It springs from an entire ignorance of psychology. Man can believe the impossible, but man can never believe the improbable. However, I must read the end of my article:

"What we have to do, what at any rate it is our duty to do, is to revive this old art of Lying. Much, of course, may be done, in the way of educating the public, by amateurs in the domestic circle, at literary lunches, and at afternoon teas. But this is merely the light and graceful side of lying, such as was probably heard at Cretan dinner parties. There are many other forms. Lying for the

sake of gaining some immediate personal advantage, for instance—lying with a moral purpose, as it is usually called—though of late it has been rather looked down upon, was extremely popular with the antique world. Athena laughs when Odysseus tells her 'his words of sly devising,' as Mr. William Morris phrases it, and the glory of mendacity illumines the pale brow of the stainless hero of Euripidean tragedy, and sets among the noble women of the past the young bride of one of Horace's most exquisite odes. Later on, what at first had been merely a natural instinct was elevated into a self-conscious science. Elaborate rules were laid down for the guidance of mankind, and an important school of literature grew up round the subject. Indeed, when one remembers the excellent philosophical treatise of Sanchez on the whole question, one cannot help regretting that no one has ever thought of publishing a cheap and condensed edition of the works of that great casuist. A short primer, 'When to Lie and How,' if brought out in an attractive and not too expensive a form, would, no doubt, command a large sale, and would prove of real practical service to many earnest and deep-thinking people. Lying for the sake of the improvement of the young, which is the basis

of home education, still lingers amongst us, and its advantages are so admirably set forth in the early books of Plato's *Republic* that it is unnecessary to dwell upon them here. It is a mode of lying for which all good mothers have peculiar capabilities, but it is capable of still further development, and has been sadly overlooked by the School Board. Lying for the sake of a monthly salary is, of course, well known in Fleet Street, and the profession of a political leader-writer is not without its advantages. But it is said to be a somewhat dull occupation, and it certainly does not lead to much beyond a kind of ostentatious obscurity. The only form of lying that is absolutely beyond reproach is Lying for its own sake, and the highest development of this is, as we have already pointed out, Lying in Art. Just as those who do not love Plato more than Truth cannot pass beyond the threshold of the Academe, so those who do not love Beauty more than Truth never know the inmost shrine of Art. The solid, stolid British intellect lies in the desert sands like the Sphinx in Flaubert's marvellous tale, and fantasy, *La Chimère,* dances round it, and calls to it with her false, flute-toned voice. It may not hear her now, but surely some day, when we are all bored

to death with the commonplace character of modern fiction, it will hearken to her and try to borrow her wings.

"And when that day dawns, or sunset reddens, how joyous we shall all be! Facts will be regarded as discreditable, Truth will be found mourning over her fetters, and Romance, with her temper of wonder, will return to the land. The very aspect of the world will change to our startled eyes. Out of the sea will rise Behemoth and Leviathan, and sail round the high-pooped galleys, as they do on the delightful maps of those ages when books on geography were actually readable. Dragons will wander about the waste places, and the phœnix will soar from her nest of fire into the air. We shall lay our hands upon the basilisk, and see the jewel in the toad's head. Champing his gilded oats, the Hippogriff will stand in our stalls, and over our heads will float the Blue Bird, singing of beautiful and impossible things, of things that are lovely and that never happen, of things that are not and that should be. But before this comes to pass, we must cultivate the lost art of Lying."

Cyril. Then we must certainly cultivate it at once. But in order to avoid making any error, I

want you to tell me briefly the doctrines of the new æsthetics.

Vivian. Briefly, then, they are these. Art never expresses anything but itself. It has an independent life, just as Thought has, and develops purely on its own lines. It is not necessarily realistic in an age of realism, nor spiritual in an age of faith. So far from being the creation of its time, it is usually in direct opposition to it, and the only history that it preserves for us is the history of its own progress. Sometimes it returns upon its footsteps, and revives some antique form, as happened in the archaistic movement of late Greek Art, and in the pre-Raphaelite movement of our own day. At other times it entirely anticipates its age, and produces in one century work that it takes another century to understand, to appreciate, and to enjoy. In no case does it reproduce its age. To pass from the art of a time to the time itself is the great mistake that all historians commit.

The second doctrine is this. All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals. Life and Nature may sometimes be used as a part of Art's rough material, but before they are of any real service to art they must

be translated into artistic conventions. The moment Art surrenders its imaginative medium it surrenders everything. As a method, Realism is a complete failure, and the two things that every artist should avoid are modernity of form and modernity of subject-matter. To us, who live in the nineteenth century, any century is a suitable subject for art except our own. The only beautiful things are the things that do not concern us. It is, to have the pleasure of quoting myself, exactly because Hecuba is nothing to us that her sorrows are so suitable a motive for a tragedy. Besides, it is only the modern that ever becomes old-fashioned. M. Zola sits down to give us a picture of the Second Empire. Who cares for the Second Empire now? It is out of date. Life goes faster than Realism, but Romanticism is always in front of Life.

The third doctrine is that Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life. This results not merely from Life's imitative instinct, but from the fact that the self-conscious aim of Life is to find expression, and that Art offers it certain beautiful forms through which it may realise that energy. It is a theory that has never been put forward before, but it is extremely fruitful, and

throws an entirely new light upon the history of Art.

It follows, as a corollary from this, that external Nature also imitates Art. The only effects that she can show us are effects that we have already seen through poetry, or in paintings. This is the secret of Nature's charm, as well as the explanation of Nature's weakness.

The final revelation is that Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art. But of this I think I have spoken at sufficient length. And now let us go out on the terrace, where "droops the milk-white peacock like a ghost," while the evening star "washes the dusk with silver." At twilight nature becomes a wonderfully suggestive effect, and is not without loveliness, though perhaps its chief use is to illustrate quotations from the poets. Come! We have talked long enough.

Pen, Pencil, and Poison

A Study in Green

PEN, PENCIL, AND POISON.

It has constantly been made a subject of reproach against artists and men of letters that they are lacking in wholeness and completeness of nature. As a rule, this must necessarily be so. That very concentration of vision and intensity of purpose which is the characteristic of the artistic temperament is in itself a mode of limitation. To those who are preoccupied with the beauty of form, nothing else seems of much importance. Yet there are many exceptions to this rule. Rubens served as ambassador, and Goethe as state councillor, and Milton as Latin secretary to Cromwell. Sophocles held civic office in his own city; the humourists, essayists, and novelists of modern America seem to desire nothing better than to become the diplomatic representatives of their country; and Charles Lamb's friend, Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, the subject of this brief memoir, though of an extremely artistic temperament, followed many masters

other than art, being not merely a poet and a painter, an art critic, an antiquarian, and a writer of prose, an amateur of beautiful things, and a dilettante of things delightful, but also a forger of no mean or ordinary capabilities, and as a subtle and secret poisoner almost without rival in this or any age.

This remarkable man, so powerful with "pen, pencil, and poison," as a great poet of our own day has finely said of him, was born at Chiswick, in 1794. His father was the son of a distinguished solicitor of Gray's Inn and Hatton Garden. His mother was the daughter of the celebrated Dr. Griffiths, the editor and founder of the *Monthly Review,* the partner in another literary speculation of Thomas Davies, that famous bookseller of whom Johnson said that he was not a bookseller, but "a gentleman who dealt in books," the friend of Goldsmith and Wedgwood, and one of the most well-known men of his day. Mrs. Wainewright died, in giving him birth, at the early age of twenty-one, and an obituary notice in the *Gentleman's Magazine* tells us of her "amiable disposition and numerous accomplishments," and adds, somewhat quaintly, that "she is supposed to have understood the writings of Mr. Locke as well as

perhaps any person of either sex now living." His father did not long survive his young wife, and the little child seems to have been brought up by his grandfather, and, on the death of the latter, in 1803, by his uncle, George Edward Griffiths, whom he subsequently poisoned. His boyhood was passed at Linden House, Turnham Green, one of those many fine Georgian mansions that have, unfortunately, disappeared before the inroads of the suburban builder, and to its lovely gardens and well timbered park he owed that simple and impassioned love of nature which never left him all through his life, and which made him so peculiarly susceptible to the spiritual influences of Wordsworth's poetry. He went to school at Charles Burney's academy at Hammersmith. Mr. Burney was the son of the historian of music, and the near kinsman of the artistic lad who was destined to turn out his most remarkable pupil. He seems to have been a man of a good deal of culture, and in after years Mr. Wainewright often spoke of him with much affection as a philosopher, an archæologist, and an admirable teacher, who, while he valued the intellectual side of education, did not forget the importance of early moral training. It was under Mr. Burney that he first developed

his talent as an artist, and Mr. Hazlitt tells us that a drawing-book which he used at school is still extant, and displays great talent and natural feeling. Indeed, painting was the first art that fascinated him. It was not till much later that he sought to find expression by pen or poison.

Before this, however, he seems to have been carried away by boyish dreams of the romance and chivalry of a soldier's life, and to have become a young guardsman. But the reckless, dissipated life of his companions failed to satisfy the refined, artistic temperament of one who was made for other things. In a short time he wearied of the service. "Art," he tells us, in words that still move by their ardent sincerity and strange fervour, "Art touched her renegade; by her pure and high influences the noisome mists were purged; my feelings, parched hot, and tarnished, were renovated with cool, fresh bloom, simple, beautiful to the simple-hearted." But Art was not the only cause of the change. "The writings of Wordsworth," he goes on to say, "did much towards calming the confusing whirl necessarily incident to sudden mutations. I wept over them tears of happiness and gratitude." He accordingly left the army, with its rough barrack life and coarse mess-room tittle-

tattle, and returned to Linden House, full of this new-born enthusiasm for culture. A severe illness, in which, to use his own words, he was "broken like a vessel of clay," prostrated him for a time. His delicately strung organisation, however indifferent it might have been to inflicting pain on others, was itself most keenly sensitive to pain. He shrank from suffering as a thing that mars and maims human life, and seems to have wandered through that terrible valley of melancholia from which so many great, perhaps greater, spirits have never emerged. But he was young —only twenty-five years of age—and he soon passed out of the "dead black waters," as he called them, into the larger air of humanistic culture. As he was recovering from the illness that had led him almost to the gates of death, he conceived the idea of taking up literature as an art. "I said with John Woodvill," he cries, "it were a life of gods to dwell in such an element," to see, and hear, and write brave things:—

> **"These high and gusty relishes of life**
> **Have no allayings of mortality."**

It is impossible not to feel that in this passage we have the utterance of a man who had a true

passion for letters. "To see, and hear, and write brave things," this was his aim.

Scott, the editor of the *London Magazine,* struck by the young man's genius, or under the influence of the strange fascination that he exercised on every one who knew him, invited him to write a series of articles on artistic subjects, and under a series of fanciful pseudonyms he began to contribute to the literature of his day. *Janus Weathercock, Egomet Bonmot,* and *Van Vinkvooms,* were some of the grotesque masks under which he chose to hide his seriousness, or to reveal his levity. A mask tells us more than a face. These disguises intensified his personality. In an incredibly short time he seems to have made his mark. Charles Lamb speaks of "kind, light-hearted Wainewright," whose prose is "capital." We hear of him entertaining Macready, John Forster, Maginn, Talfourd, Sir Wentworth Dilke, the poet John Clare, and others, at a *petit-dîner.* Like Disraeli, he determined to startle the town as a dandy, and his beautiful rings, his antique cameo breastpin, and his pale lemon-coloured kid gloves, were well known, and indeed were regarded by Hazlitt as being the signs of a new manner in literature: while his rich, curly hair, fine eyes, and exquisite

white hands, gave him the dangerous and delightful distinction of being different from others. There was something in him of Balzac's Lucien de Rubempré. At times he reminds us of Julien Sorel. De Quincey saw him once. It was at a dinner at Charles Lamb's. "Amongst the company, all literary men, sat a murderer," he tells us, and he goes on to describe how on that day he had been ill, and had hated the face of man and woman, and yet found himself looking with intellectual interest across the table at the young writer beneath whose affectations of manner there seemed to him to lie so much unaffected sensibility, and speculates on "what sudden growth of another interest" would have changed his mood, had he known of what terrible sin the guest to whom Lamb paid so much attention was even then guilty.

His life-work falls naturally under the three heads suggested by Mr. Swinburne, and it may be partly admitted that, if we set aside his achievements in the sphere of poison, what he has actually left to us hardly justifies his reputation.

But then it is only the Philistine who seeks to estimate a personality by the vulgar test of production. This young dandy sought to be some-

body, rather than to do something. He recognised that Life itself is an art, and has its modes of style no less than the arts that seek to express it. Nor is his work without interest. We hear of William Blake stopping in the Royal Academy before one of his pictures and pronouncing it to be "very fine." His essays are prefiguring of much that has since been realised. He seems to have anticipated some of those accidents of modern culture that are regarded by many as true essentials. He writes about La Gioconda, and early French poets, and the Italian Renaissance. He loves Greek gems, and Persian carpets, and Elizabethan translations of *Cupid and Psyche*, and the *Hypnerotomachia*, and book-bindings, and early editions, and wide-margined proofs. He is keenly sensitive to the value of beautiful surroundings, and never wearies of describing to us the rooms in which he lived, or would have liked to live. He had that curious love of green which, in individuals, is always the sign of a subtle artistic temperament, and in nations is said to denote a laxity, if not a decadence of morals. Like Baudelaire, he was extremely fond of cats, and with Gautier, he was fascinated by that "sweet marble monster" of

both sexes that we can still see at Florence and in the Louvre.

There is, of course, much in his descriptions, and his suggestions for decoration, that shows that he did not entirely free himself from the false taste of his time. But it is clear that he was one of the first to recognise what is, indeed, the very keynote of æsthetic eclecticism, I mean the true harmony of all really beautiful things, irrespective of age or place, of school or manner. He saw that in decorating a room, which is to be, not a room for show, but a room to live in, we should never aim at any archæological reconstruction of the past, nor burden ourselves with any fanciful necessity for historical accuracy. In this artistic perception he was perfectly right. All beautiful things belong to the same age.

And so, in his own library, as he describes it, we find the delicate fictile vase of the Greek, with its exquisitely painted figures and the faint *ΚΑΛΟΣ* finely traced upon its side, and behind it hangs an engraving of the "Delphic Sibyl" of Michael Angelo, or of the "Pastoral" of Giorgione. Here is a bit of Florentine majolica, and here a rude lamp from some old Roman tomb. On the table lies a book of Hours, "cased in a cover of solid

silver gilt, wrought with quaint devices and studded with small brilliants and rubies," and close by it "squats a little ugly monster, a Lar, perhaps, dug up in the sunny fields of corn-bearing Sicily." Some dark antique bronzes contrast "with the pale gleam of two noble *Christi Crucifixi,* one carved in ivory, the other moulded in wax." He has his trays of Tassie's gems, his tiny Louis-Quatorze *bonbonnière* with a miniature by Petitot, his highly prized "brown-biscuit teapots, filagree-worked," his citron morocco letter-case, and his "pomona-green" chair.

One can fancy him lying there in the midst of his books and casts and engravings, a true virtuoso, a subtle connoisseur, turning over his fine collection of Marc Antonios, and his Turner's "Liber Studiorum," of which he was a warm admirer, or examining with a magnifier some of his antique gems and cameos, "the head of Alexander on an onyx of two strata," or "that superb *altissimo relievo* on cornelian, Jupiter Ægiochus." He was always a great amateur of engravings, and gives some very useful suggestions as to the best means of forming a collection. Indeed, while fully appreciating modern art, he never lost sight of the importance of reproductions of the great master-

pieces of the past, and all that he says about the value of plaster casts is quite admirable.

As an art critic he concerned himself primarily with the complex impressions produced by a work of art, and certainly the first step in æsthetic criticism is to realise one's own impressions. He cared nothing for abstract discussions on the nature of the Beautiful, and the historical method, which has since yielded such rich fruit, did not belong to his day, but he never lost sight of the great truth that Art's first appeal is neither to the intellect nor to the emotions, but purely to the artistic temperament, and he more than once points out that this temperament, this "taste," as he calls it, being unconsciously guided and made perfect by frequent contact with the best work, becomes in the end a form of right judgment. Of course, there are fashions in art just as there are fashions in dress, and perhaps none of us can ever quite free ourselves from the influence of custom and the influence of novelty. He certainly could not, and he frankly acknowledges how difficult it is to form any fair estimate of contemporary work. But, on the whole, his taste was good and sound. He admired Turner and Constable at a time when they were not so much thought of as they are now,

and saw that for the highest landscape art we require more than "mere industry and accurate transcription." Of Crome's "Heath Scene near Norwich" he remarks that it shows "how much a subtle observation of the elements, in their wild moods, does for a most uninteresting flat," and of the popular type of landscape of his day he says that it is "simply an enumeration of hill and dale, stumps of trees, shrubs, water, meadows, cottages, and houses; little more than topography, a kind of pictorial mapwork; in which rainbows, showers, mists, haloes, large beams shooting through rifted clouds, storms, starlight, all the most valued materials of the real painter, are not." He had a thorough dislike of what is obvious or commonplace in art, and while he was charmed to entertain Wilkie at dinner, he cared as little for Sir David's pictures as he did for Mr. Crabbe's poems. With the imitative and realistic tendencies of his day he had no sympathy, and he tells us frankly that his great admiration for Fuseli was largely due to the fact that the little Swiss did not consider it necessary that an artist should only paint what he sees. The qualities that he sought for in a picture were composition, beauty and dignity of line, richness of colour, and

imaginative power. Upon the other hand, he was not a doctrinaire. "I hold that no work of art can be tried otherwise than by laws deduced from itself: whether or not it be consistent with itself is the question." This is one of his excellent aphorisms. And in criticising painters so different as Landseer and Martin, Stothard and Etty, he shows that, to use a phrase now classical, he is trying "to see the object as in itself it really is."

However, as I pointed out before, he never feels quite at his ease in his criticisms of contemporary work. "The present," he says, "is about as agreeable a confusion to me as Ariosto on the first perusal. . . . Modern things dazzle me. I must look at them through Time's telescope. Elia complains that to him the merit of a MS. poem is uncertain; 'print,' as he excellently says, 'settles it.' Fifty years' toning does the same thing to a picture." He is happier when he is writing about Watteau and Lancret, about Rubens and Giorgione, about Rembrandt, Correggio, and Michael Angelo; happiest of all when he is writing about Greek things. What is Gothic touched him very little, but classical art and the art of the Renaissance were always dear to him. He saw what our English school could gain from a study of Greek

models, and never wearies of pointing out to the young student the artistic possibilities that lie dormant in Hellenic marbles and Hellenic methods of work. In his judgments on the great Italian Masters, says De Quincey, "There seemed a tone of sincerity and of native sensibility, as in one who spoke for himself, and was not merely a copier from books." The highest praise that we can give to him is that he tried to revive style as a conscious tradition. But he saw that no amount of art lectures or art congresses, or "plans for advancing the fine arts," will ever produce this result. The people, he says very wisely, and in the true spirit of Toynbee Hall, must always have "the best models constantly before their eyes."

As is to be expected from one who was a painter, he is often extremely technical in his art criticisms. Of Tintoret's "St. George delivering the Egyptian Princess from the Dragon" he remarks:—

> **"The robe of Sabra, warmly glazed with Prussian blue, is relieved from the pale greenish background by a vermilion scarf; and the full hues of both are beautifully echoed, as it were, in a lower key by the purple-lake coloured stuffs and bluish iron armour of the saint, besides an ample balance to the vivid azure drapery on the foreground in the indigo shades of the wild wood surrounding the castle."**

And elsewhere he talks learnedly of "a delicate Schiavone, various as a tulip bed, with rich broken tints," of "a glowing portrait, remarkable for *morbidezza,* by the scarce Moroni," and of another picture being "pulpy in the carnations."

But, as a rule, he deals with his impressions of the work as an artistic whole, and tries to translate those impressions into words, to give, as it were, the literary equivalent for the imaginative and mental effect. He was one of the first to develop what has been called the art-literature of the nineteenth century, that form of literature which has found in Mr. Ruskin and Mr. Browning its two most perfect exponents. His description of Lancret's *Repas Italien,* in which "a dark-haired girl, 'amorous of mischief,' lies on the daisy-powdered grass," is in some respects very charming. Here is his account of "The Crucifixion," by Rembrandt. It is extremely characteristic of his style:

"Darkness — sooty, portentous darkness — shrouds the whole scene: only above the accursed wood, as if through a horrid rift in the murky ceiling, a rainy deluge—'sleety-flaw, discoloured water'—streams down amain, spreading a grisly, spectral light, even more horrible than that palpable night. Already the Earth pants thick and fast! the darkened Cross trembles!

the winds are dropt—the air is stagnant—a muttering rumble growls underneath their feet, and some of that miserable crowd begin to fly down the hill. The horses snuff the coming terror, and become unmanageable through fear. The moment rapidly approaches when, nearly torn asunder by His own weight, fainting with loss of blood, which now runs in narrow rivulets from His slit veins, His temples and breast drowned in sweat, and His black tongue parched with the fiery death-fever, Jesus cries, 'I thirst.' The deadly vinegar is elevated to Him.

"His head sinks, and the sacred corpse 'swings senseless of the cross.' A sheet of vermilion flame shoots sheer through the air and vanishes; the rocks of Carmel and Lebanon cleave asunder; the sea rolls on high from the sands its black, weltering waves. Earth yawns, and the graves give up their dwellers. The dead and the living are mingled together in unnatural conjunction and hurry through the holy city. New prodigies await them there. The veil of the temple—the unpierceable veil—is rent asunder from top to bottom, and that dreaded recess containing the Hebrew mysteries—the fatal ark with the tables and seven-branched candelabrum—is disclosed by the light of unearthly flames to the God-deserted multitude.

"Rembrandt never *painted* this sketch, and he was quite right. It would have lost nearly all its charms in losing that perplexing veil of indistinctness which affords such ample range wherein the doubting imagination may speculate. At present it is like a thing in another world. A dark gulf is betwixt us. It is not tangible by the body. We can only approach it in the spirit."

In this passage, written, the author tells us, "in awe and reverence," there is much that is terrible, and very much that is quite horrible, but it is not without a certain crude form of power, or, at any rate, a certain crude violence of words, a quality which this age should highly appreciate, as it is its chief defect. It is pleasanter, however, to pass to this description of Giulio Romano's "Cephalus and Procris":—

"We should read Moschus's lament for Bion, the sweet shepherd, before looking at this picture, or study the picture as a preparation for the lament. We have nearly the same images in both. For either victim the high groves and forest dells murmur; the flowers exhale sad perfume from their buds; the nightingale mourns on the craggy lands, and the swallow in the long-winding vales; 'the satyrs, too, and fauns dark-veiled groan,' and the fountain nymphs within the wood melt into tearful waters. The sheep and goats leave their pasture; and oreads, 'who love to scale the most inaccessible tops of all uprightest rocks,' hurry down from the song of their wind-courting pines; while the dryads bend from the branches of the meeting trees, and the rivers moan for white Procris, 'with many-sobbing streams,'

'Filling the far-seen ocean with a voice.'

The golden bees are silent on the thymy Hymettus; and the knelling horn of Aurora's love no more shall

scatter away the cold twilight on the top of Hymettus. The foreground of our subject is a grassy, sunburnt bank, broken into swells and hollows like waves (a sort of land-breakers), rendered more uneven by many foot-tripping roots and stumps of trees stocked untimely by the axe, which are again throwing out light green shoots. This bank rises rather suddenly on the right to a clustering grove, penetrable to no star, at the entrance of which sits the stunned Thessalian king, holding between his knees that ivory-bright body which was, but an instant agone, parting the rough boughs with her smooth forehead, and treading alike on thorns and flowers with jealousy-stung foot—now helpless, heavy, void of all motion, save when the breeze lifts her thick hair in mockery.

"From between the closely-neighboured boles astonished nymphs press forward with loud cries—

'And deerskin-vested satyrs, crowned with ivy twists,
advance;
And put strange pity in their horned countenance.'

"Laelaps lies beneath, and shows by his panting the rapid pace of death. On the other side of the group, Virtuous Love with 'vans dejected' holds forth the arrow to an approaching troop of sylvan people, fauns, rams, goats, satyrs, and satyr-mothers, pressing their children tighter with their fearful hands, who hurry along from the left in a sunken path between the foreground and a rocky wall, on whose lowest ridge a brook-guardian pours from her urn her grief-telling waters. Above, and more remote than

the Ephidryad, another female, rending her locks, appears among the vine-festooned pillars of an unshorn grove. The centre of the picture is filled by shady meadows, sinking down to a river-mouth; beyond is 'the vast strength of the ocean stream,' from whose floor the extinguisher of stars, rosy Aurora, drives furiously up her brine-washed steeds to behold the death-pangs of her rival."

Were this description carefully rewritten, it would be quite admirable. The conception of making a prose-poem out of paint is excellent. Much of the best modern literature springs from the same aim. In a very ugly and sensible age, the arts borrow, not from life, but from each other.

His sympathies, too, were wonderfully varied. In everything connected with the stage, for instance, he was always extremely interested, and strongly upheld the necessity for archæological accuracy in costume and scene-painting. "In art," he says in one of his essays, "whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well;" and he points out that once we allow the intrusion of anachronisms, it becomes difficult to say where the line is to be drawn. In literature, again, like Lord Beaconsfield on a famous occasion, he was, "on the side of the angels." He was one of the

first to admire Keats and Shelley—"the tremulously sensitive and poetical Shelley," as he calls him. His admiration for Wordsworth was sincere and profound. He thoroughly appreciated William Blake. One of the best copies of the "Songs of Innocence and Experience" that is now in existence was wrought specially for him. He loved Alain Chartier, and Ronsard, and the Elizabethan dramatists, and Chaucer and Chapman, and Petrarch. And to him all the arts were one. "Art critics," he remarks with much wisdom, "seem hardly aware of the identity of the primal seeds of poetry and painting, nor that any true advancement in the serious study of one art co-generates a proportionate perfection in the other;" and he says elsewhere that if a man who does not admire Michael Angelo talks of his love for Milton, he is deceiving either himself or his listeners. To his fellow-contributors in the *London Magazine* he was always most generous, and praises Barry Cornwall, Allan Cunningham, Hazlitt, Elton, and Leigh Hunt without anything of the malice of a friend. Some of his sketches of Charles Lamb are admirable in their way, and, with the art of the true comedian, borrow their style from their subject:—

"What can I say of thee more than all know? that thou hadst the gaiety of a boy with the knowledge of a man: as gentle a heart as ever sent tears to the eyes.

"How wittily would he mistake your meaning, and put in a conceit most seasonably out of season. His talk, without affectation, was compressed, like his beloved Elizabethans, even unto obscurity. Like grains of fine gold, his sentences would beat out into whole sheets. He had small mercy on spurious fame, and a caustic observation on the *fashion for men of genius* was a standing dish. Sir Thomas Browne was a 'bosom cronie' of his; so was Burton, and old Fuller. In his amorous vein he dallied with that peerless Duchess of many-folio odour; and with the heyday comedies of Beaumont and Fletcher he induced light dreams. He would deliver critical touches on these, like one inspired, but it was good to let him choose his own game; if another began even on the acknowledged pets he was liable to interrupt, or rather append, in a mode difficult to define whether as misapprehensive or mischievous. One night at C——'s, the above dramatic partners were the temporary subject of chat. Mr. X. commended the passion and haughty style of a tragedy (I don't know which of them), but was instantly taken up by Elia, who told him '*That* was nothing; the lyrics were the high things—the lyrics!'"

One side of his literary career deserves special notice. Modern journalism may be said to owe almost as much to him as to any man of the early part of this century. He was the pioneer of

Asiatic prose, and delighted in pictorial epithets and pompous exaggerations. To have a style so gorgeous that it conceals the subject is one of the highest achievements of an important and much admired school of Fleet Street leader-writers, and this school *Janus Weathercock* may be said to have invented. He also saw that it was quite easy by continued reiteration to make the public interested in his own personality, and in his purely journalistic articles this extraordinary young man tells the world what he had for dinner, where he gets his clothes, what wines he likes, and in what state of health he is, just as if he were writing weekly notes for some popular newspaper of our own time. This being the least valuable side of his work, is the one that has had the most obvious influence. A publicist, nowadays, is a man who bores the community with the details of the illegalities of his private life.

Like most artificial people he had a great love of nature. "I hold three things in high estimation," he says somewhere: "to sit lazily on an eminence that commands a rich prospect; to be shadowed by thick trees while the sun shines around me; and to enjoy solitude with the con-

sciousness of neighbourhood. The country gives them all to me." He writes about his wandering over fragrant furze and heath repeating Collins's "Ode to Evening," just to catch the fine quality of the moment; about smothering his face "in a watery bed of cowslips, wet with May dews"; and about the pleasure of seeing the sweet-breathed kine "pass slowly homeward through the twilight," and hearing "the distant clank of the sheep-bell." One phrase of his, "the polyanthus glowed in its cold bed of earth, like a solitary picture of Giorgione on a dark oaken panel," is curiously characteristic of his temperament, and this passage is rather pretty in its way—

"The short, tender grass was covered with marguerites—'such that men called *daisies* in our town'—thick as stars on a summer's night. The harsh caw of the busy rooks came, pleasantly mellowed, from a high, dusky grove of elms at some distance off, and at intervals was heard the voice of a boy scaring away the birds from the newly-sown seeds. The blue depths were the colour of the darkest ultramarine; not a cloud streaked the calm æther; only round the horizon's edge streamed a light, warm film of misty vapour, against which the near village, with its ancient stone church, showed sharply out with blinding whiteness. I thought of Wordsworth's 'Lines written in March.'"

However, we must not forget that the cultivated young man who penned these lines, and who was so susceptible to Wordsworthian influences, was also, as I said at the beginning of this memoir, one of the most subtle and secret poisoners of this or any age. How he first became fascinated by this strange sin he does not tell us, and the diary in which he carefully noted the results of his terrible experiments and the methods that he adopted, has unfortunately been lost to us. Even in later days, too, he was always reticent on the matter, and preferred to speak about "The Excursion," and the "Poems founded on the Affections." There is no doubt, however, that the poison that he used was strychnine. In one of the beautiful rings of which he was so proud, and which served to show off the fine modelling of his delicate ivory hands, he used to carry crystals of the Indian *nux vomica,* a poison, one of his biographers tells us, "nearly tasteless, difficult of discovery, and capable of almost infinite dilution." His murders, says De Quincey, were more than were ever made known judicially. This is no doubt so, and some of them are worthy of mention. His first victim was his uncle, Mr. Thomas Griffiths. He poisoned him in 1829 to gain possession of Linden House,

a place to which he had always been very much attached. In the August of the next year he poisoned Mrs. Abercrombie, his wife's mother, and in the following December he poisoned the lovely Helen Abercrombie, his sister-in-law. Why he murdered Mrs. Abercrombie is not ascertained. It may have been for a caprice, or to quicken some hideous sense of power that was in him, or because she suspected something, or for no reason. But the murder of Helen Abercrombie was carried out by himself and his wife for the sake of a sum of about 18,000*l.* for which they had insured her life in various offices. The circumstances were as follows. On the 12th of December, he and his wife and child came up to London from Linden House, and took lodgings at No. 13, Conduit Street, Regent Street. With them were the two sisters, Helen and Madeleine Abercrombie. On the evening of the 14th they all went to the play, and at supper that night Helen sickened. The next day she was extremely ill, and Dr. Locock, of Hanover Square, was called in to attend her. She lived till Monday, the 20th, when, after the doctor's morning visit, Mr. and Mrs. Wainewright brought her some poisoned jelly, and then went out for a walk. When they returned Helen Abercrombie was dead.

She was about twenty years of age, a tall, graceful girl with fair hair. A very charming red-chalk drawing of her by her brother-in-law is still in existence, and shows how much his style as an artist was influenced by Sir Thomas Lawrence, a painter for whose work he had always entertained a great admiration. De Quincey says that Mrs. Wainewright was not really privy to the murder. Let us hope that she was not. Sin should be solitary, and have no accomplices.

The insurance companies, suspecting the real facts of the case, declined to pay the policy on the technical ground of misrepresentation and want of interest, and, with curious courage, the poisoner entered an action in the Court of Chancery against the Imperial, it being agreed that one decision should govern all the cases. The trial, however, did not come on for five years, when, after one disagreement, a verdict was ultimately given in the companies' favour. The judge on the occasion was Lord Abinger. *Egomet Bonmot* was represented by Mr. Erle and Sir William Follet, and the Attorney-General and Sir Frederick Pollock appeared for the other side. The plaintiff, unfortunately, was unable to be present at either of the trials. The refusal of the companies to give him

the 18,000*l.* had placed him in a position of most painful pecuniary embarrassment. Indeed, a few months after the murder of Helen Abercrombie, he had been actually arrested for debt in the streets of London while he was serenading the pretty daughter of one of his friends. This difficulty was got over at the time, but shortly afterwards he thought it better to go abroad till he could come to some practical arrangement with his creditors. He accordingly went to Boulogne on a visit to the father of the young lady in question, and while he was there induced him to insure his life with the Pelican Company for 3000*l.* As soon as the necessary formalities had been gone through and the policy executed, he dropped some crystals of strychnine into his coffee as they sat together one evening after dinner. He himself did not gain any monetary advantage by doing this. His aim was simply to revenge himself on the first office that had refused to pay him the price of his sin. His friend died the next day in his presence, and he left Boulogne at once for a sketching tour through the most picturesque parts of Brittany, and was for some time the guest of an old French gentleman, who had a beautiful country house at St. Omer. From this he moved to Paris, where

he remained for several years, living in luxury, some say, while others talk of his "skulking with poison in his pocket, and being dreaded by all who knew him." In 1837 he returned to England privately. Some strange mad fascination brought him back. He followed a woman whom he loved.

It was the month of June, and he was staying at one of the hotels in Covent Garden. His sitting-room was on the ground floor, and he prudently kept the blinds down for fear of being seen. Thirteen years before, when he was making his fine collection of majolicas and Marc Antonios, he had forged the names of his trustees to a power of attorney, which enabled him to get possession of some of the money which he had inherited from his mother, and had brought into marriage settlement. He knew that this forgery had been discovered, and that by returning to England he was imperilling his life. Yet he returned. Should one wonder? It was said that the woman was very beautiful. Besides, she did not love him.

It was by mere accident that he was discovered. A noise in the street attracted his attention, and, in his artistic interest in modern life, he pushed aside the blind for a moment. Some one outside

called out "That's Wainewright, the Bank-forger." It was Forrester, the Bow Street runner.

On the 5th of July he was brought up at the Old Bailey. The following report of the proceedings appeared in the *Times*:—

"Before Mr. Justice Vaughan and Mr. Baron Alderson, Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, aged forty-two, a man of gentlemanly appearance, wearing mustachios, was indicted for forging and uttering a certain power of attorney for 2259*l*., with intent to defraud the Governor and Company of the Bank of England.

"There were five indictments against the prisoner, to all of which he pleaded not guilty, when he was arraigned before Mr. Serjeant Arabin in the course of the morning. On being brought before the judges, however, he begged to be allowed to withdraw the former plea, and then pleaded guilty to two of the indictments which were not of a capital nature.

"The counsel for the Bank having explained that there were three other indictments, but that the Bank did not desire to shed blood, the plea of guilty on the two minor charges was recorded, and the prisoner, at the close of the session, sentenced by the Recorder to transportation for life."

He was taken back to Newgate, preparatory to his removal to the colonies. In a fanciful passage in one of his early essays he had fancied himself "lying in Horsemonger Gaol under sentence of death" for having been unable to resist the temptation of stealing some Marc Antonios from the

British Museum in order to complete his collection. The sentence now passed on him was to a man of his culture a form of death. He complained bitterly of it to his friends, and pointed out, with a good deal of reason, some people may fancy, that the money was practically his own, having come to him from his mother, and that the forgery, such as it was, had been committed thirteen years before, which, to use his own phrase, was at least a *circonstance attenuante*. The permanence of personality is a very subtle metaphysical problem, and certainly the English law solves the question in an extremely rough and ready manner. There is, however, something dramatic in the fact that this heavy punishment was inflicted on him for what, if we remember his fatal influence on the prose of modern journalism, was certainly not the worst of all his sins.

While he was in gaol, Dickens, Macready, and Hablot Browne came across him by chance. They had been going over the prisons of London, searching for artistic effects, and in Newgate they suddenly caught sight of Wainewright. He met them with a defiant stare, Forster tells us, but Macready was "horrified to recognise a man familiarly

known to him in former years, and at whose table he had dined."

Others had more curiosity, and his cell was for some time a kind of fashionable lounge. Many men of letters went down to visit their old literary comrade. But he was no longer the kind light-hearted Janus whom Charles Lamb admired. He seems to have grown quite cynical.

To the agent of an insurance company who was visiting him one afternoon, and thought he would improve the occasion by pointing out that, after all, crime was a bad speculation, he replied: "Sir, you City men enter on your speculations and take the chances of them. Some of your speculations succeed, some fail. Mine happen to have failed, yours happen to have succeeded. That is the only difference, sir, between my visitor and me. But, sir, I will tell you one thing in which I have succeeded to the last. I have been determined through life to hold the position of a gentleman. I have always done so. I do so still. It is the custom of this place that each of the inmates of a cell shall take his morning's turn of sweeping it out. I occupy a cell with a bricklayer and a sweep, but they never offer me the broom!" When a friend reproached him with the murder of Helen

Abercrombie he shrugged his shoulders and said, "Yes; it was a dreadful thing to do, but she had very thick ankles."

From Newgate he was brought to the hulks at Portsmouth, and sent from there in the *Susan* to Van Diemen's Land along with three hundred other convicts. The voyage seems to have been most distasteful to him, and in a letter written to a friend he spoke bitterly about the ignominy of "the companion of poets and artists" being compelled to associate with "country bumpkins." The phrase that he applies to his companions need not surprise us. Crime in England is rarely the result of sin. It is nearly always the result of starvation. There was probably no one on board in whom he would have found a sympathetic listener, or even a psychologically interesting nature.

His love of art, however, never deserted him. At Hobart Town he started a studio, and returned to sketching and portrait-painting, and his conversation and manners seem not to have lost their charm. Nor did he give up his habit of poisoning, and there are two cases on record in which he tried to make away with people who had offended him. But his hand seems to have lost its

cunning. Both of his attempts were complete failures, and in 1844, being thoroughly dissatisfied with Tasmanian society, he presented a memorial to the governor of the settlement, Sir John Eardley Wilmot, praying for a ticket-of-leave. In it he speaks of himself as being "tormented by ideas struggling for outward form and realisation, barred up from increase of knowledge, and deprived of the exercise of profitable or even of decorous speech." His request, however, was refused, and the associate of Coleridge consoled himself by making those marvellous *Paradis Artificiels* whose secret is only known to the eaters of opium. In 1852 he died of apoplexy, his sole living companion being a cat, for which he had evinced an extraordinary affection.

His crimes seem to have had an important effect upon his art. They gave a strong personality to his style, a quality that his early work certainly lacked. In a note to the Life of Dickens, Forster mentions that in 1847 Lady Blessington received from her brother, Major Power, who held a military appointment at Hobart Town, an oil portrait of a young lady from his clever brush; and it is said that "he contrived to put the expression of his own wickedness into the portrait of a nice, kind-

hearted girl." M. Zola, in one of his novels, tells us of a young man who, having committed a murder, takes to art, and paints greenish impressionist portraits of perfectly respectable people, all of which bear a curious resemblance to his victim. The development of Mr. Wainewright's style seems to me far more subtle and suggestive. One can fancy an intense personality being created out of sin.

This strange and fascinating figure that for a few years dazzled literary London, and made so brilliant a *début* in life and letters, is undoubtedly a most interesting study. Mr. W. Carew Hazlitt, his latest biographer, to whom I am indebted for many of the facts contained in this memoir, and whose little book is, indeed, quite invaluable in its way, is of opinion that his love of art and nature was a mere pretence and assumption, and others have denied to him all literary power. This seems to me a shallow, or at least a mistaken, view. The fact of a man being a poisoner is nothing against his prose. The domestic virtues are not the true basis of art, though they may serve as an excellent advertisement for second-rate artists. It is possible that De Quincey exaggerated his critical powers, and I cannot help saying again that

there is much in his published works that is too familiar, too common, too journalistic, in the bad sense of that bad word. Here and there he is distinctly vulgar in expression, and he is always lacking in the self-restraint of the true artist. But for some of his faults we must blame the time in which he lived, and, after all, prose that Charles Lamb thought "capital" has no small historic interest. That he had a sincere love of art and nature seems to me quite certain. There is no essential incongruity between crime and culture. We cannot re-write the whole of history for the purpose of gratifying our moral sense of what should be.

Of course, he is far too close to our own time for us to be able to form any purely artistic judgment about him. It is impossible not to feel a strong prejudice against a man who might have poisoned Lord Tennyson, or Mr. Gladstone, or the Master of Balliol. But had the man worn a costume and spoken a language different from our own, had he lived in imperial Rome, or at the time of the Italian Renaissance, or in Spain in the seventeenth century, or in any land or any century but this century and this land, we would be quite able to arrive at a perfectly unprejudiced

estimate of his position and value. I know that there are many historians, or at least writers on historical subjects, who still think it necessary to apply moral judgments to history, and who distribute their praise or blame with the solemn complacency of a successful schoolmaster. This, however, is a foolish habit, and merely shows that the moral instinct can be brought to such a pitch of perfection that it will make its appearance wherever it is not required. Nobody with the true historical sense ever dreams of blaming Nero, or scolding Tiberius or censuring Cæsar Borgia. These personages have become like the puppets of a play. They may fill us with terror, or horror, or wonder, but they do not harm us. They are not in immediate relation to us. We have nothing to fear from them. They have passed into the sphere of art and science, and neither art nor science knows anything of moral approval or disapproval. And so it may be some day with Charles Lamb's friend. At present I feel that he is just a little too modern to be treated in that fine spirit of disinterested curiosity to which we owe so many charming studies of the great criminals of the Italian Renaissance from the pens of Mr. John Addington Symonds, Miss A. Mary F. Robinson,

Miss Vernon Lee, and other distinguished writers. However, Art has not forgotten him. He is the hero of Dickens's *Hunted Down,* the Varney of Bulwer's *Lucretia;* and it is gratifying to note that fiction has paid some homage to one who was so powerful with "pen, pencil, and poison." To be suggestive for fiction is to be of more importance than a fact.

The Critic as Artist

With Some Remarks Upon the Importance of Discussing Everything

A DIALOGUE. Part I.

Persons: Gilbert and Ernest. Scene: the library of a house in Piccadilly, overlooking the Green Park.

THE CRITIC AS ARTIST.

Gilbert (*at the piano*). My dear Ernest, what are you laughing at?

Ernest (*looking up*). At a capital story that I have just come across in this volume of Reminiscences that I have found on your table.

Gilbert. What is the book? Ah! I see. I have not read it yet. Is it good?

Ernest. Well, while you have been playing, I have been turning over the pages with some amusement, though, as a rule, I dislike modern memoirs. They are generally written by people who have either entirely lost their memories, or have never done anything worth remembering; which, however, is, no doubt, the true explanation of their popularity, as the English public always feels perfectly at its ease when a mediocrity is talking to it.

Gilbert. Yes: the public is wonderfully tolerant. It forgives everything except genius. But I must confess that I like all memoirs. I like them for

their form, just as much as for their matter. In literature mere egotism is delightful. It is what fascinates us in the letters of personalities so different as Cicero and Balzac, Flaubert and Berlioz, Byron and Madame de Sévigné. Whenever we come across it, and, strangely enough, it is rather rare, we cannot but welcome it, and do not easily forget it. Humanity will always love Rousseau for having confessed his sins, not to a priest, but to the world, and the couchant nymphs that Cellini wrought in bronze for the castle of King Francis, the green and gold Perseus, even, that in the open Loggia at Florence shows the moon the dead terror that once turned life to stone, have not given it more pleasure than has that autobiography in which the supreme scoundrel of the Renaissance relates the story of his splendour and his shame. The opinions, the character, the achievements of the man, matter very little. He may be a sceptic like the gentle Sieur de Montaigne, or a saint like the bitter son of Monica, but when he tells us his own secrets he can always charm our ears to listening and our lips to silence. The mode of thought that Cardinal Newman represented—if that can be called a mode of thought which seeks to solve intellectual problems by a denial of the supremacy

of the intellect—may not, cannot, I think, survive. But the world will never weary of watching that troubled soul in its progress from darkness to darkness. The lonely church at Littlemore, where "the breath of the morning is damp, and worshippers are few," will always be dear to it, and whenever men see the yellow snapdragon blossoming on the wall of Trinity they will think of that gracious undergraduate who saw in the flower's sure recurrence a prophecy that he would abide for ever with the Benign Mother of his days—a prophecy that Faith, in her wisdom or her folly, suffered not to be fulfilled. Yes; autobiography is irresistible. Poor, silly, conceited Mr. Secretary Pepys has chattered away into the circle of the Immortals, and, conscious that indiscretion is the better part of valour, bustles about among them in that "shaggy purple gown with gold buttons and looped lace" which he is so fond of describing to us, perfectly at his ease, and prattling, to his own and our infinite pleasure, of the Indian blue petticoat that he bought for his wife, of the "good hog's harslet," and the "pleasant French fricassee of veal" that he loved to eat, of his game of bowls with Will Joyce, and his "gadding after beauties," and his reciting of *Hamlet* on a Sunday,

and his playing of the viol on week days, and other wicked or trivial things. Even in actual life egotism is not without its attractions. When people talk to us about others they are usually dull. When they talk to us about themselves they are nearly always interesting, and if one could shut them up, when they become wearisome, as easily as one can shut up a book of which one has grown wearied, they would be perfect absolutely.

Ernest. There is much virtue in that If, as Touchstone would say. But do you seriously propose that every man should become his own Boswell? What would become of our industrious compilers of Lives and Recollections in that case?

Gilbert. What has become of them? They are the pest of the age, nothing more and nothing less. Every great man nowadays has his disciples, and it is always Judas who writes the biography.

Ernest. My dear fellow!

Gilbert. I am afraid it is true. Formerly we used to canonise our heroes. The modern method is to vulgarise them. Cheap editions of great books may be delightful, but cheap editions of great men are absolutely detestable.

Ernest. May I ask, Gilbert, to whom you allude?

Gilbert. Oh! to all our second-rate *litterateurs.* We are overrun by a set of people who, when poet or painter passes away, arrive at the house along with the undertaker, and forget that their one duty is to behave as mutes. But we won't talk about them. They are the body-snatchers of literature. The dust is given to one, and the ashes to another, and the soul is out of their reach. And now, let me play Chopin to you, or Dvorák? Shall I play you a fantasy by Dvorák? He writes passionate, curiously coloured things.

Ernest. No; I don't want music just at present. It is far too indefinite. Besides, I took the Baroness Bernstein down to dinner last night, and, though absolutely charming in every other respect, she insisted on discussing music as if it were actually written in the German language. Now, whatever music sounds like, I am glad to say that it does not sound in the smallest degree like German. There are forms of patriotism that are really quite degrading. No, Gilbert, don't play any more. Turn round and talk to me. Talk to me till the white-horned day comes into the room. There is something in your voice that is wonderful.

Gilbert (*rising from the piano*). I am not in a

mood for talking to-night. How horrid of you to smile! I really am not. Where are the cigarettes? Thanks. How exquisite these single daffodils are? They seem to be made of amber and cool ivory. They are like Greek things of the best period. What was the story in the confessions of the remorseful Academician that made you laugh? Tell it to me. After playing Chopin, I feel as if I had been weeping over sins that I had never committed, and mourning over tragedies that were not my own. Music always seems to me to produce that effect. It creates for one a past of which one has been ignorant, and fills one with a sense of sorrows that have been hidden from one's tears. I can fancy a man who had led a perfectly commonplace life, hearing by chance some curious piece of music, and suddenly discovering that his soul, without his being conscious of it, had passed through terrible experiences, and known fearful joys, or wild romantic loves, or great renunciations. And so, tell me this story, Ernest. I want to be amused.

Ernest. Oh! I don't know that it is of any importance. But I thought it a really admirable illustration of the true value of ordinary art-criticism. It seems that a lady once gravely asked the

remorseful Academician, as you call him, if his celebrated picture of "A Spring-Day at Whiteley's," or "Waiting for the Last Omnibus," or some subject of that kind, was all painted by hand.

Gilbert. And was it?

Ernest. You are quite incorrigible. But, seriously speaking, what is the use of art-criticism? Why cannot the artist be left alone, to create a new world if he wishes it, or, if not, to shadow forth the world which we already know, and of which, I fancy, we would each one of us be wearied if Art, with her fine spirit of choice and delicate instinct of selection, did not, as it were, purify it for us, and give to it a momentary perfection. It seems to me that the imagination spreads, or should spread, a solitude around it, and works best in silence and isolation. Why should the artist be troubled by the shrill clamour of criticism? Why should those who cannot create take upon themselves to estimate the value of creative work? What can they know about it? If a man's work is easy to understand, an explanation is unnecessary.

Gilbert. And if his work is incomprehensible, an explanation is wicked.

Ernest. I did not say that.

Gilbert. Ah! but you should have. Nowadays,

we have so few mysteries left to us that we cannot afford to part with one of them. The members of the Browning Society, like the theologians of the Broad Church Party, or the authors of Mr. Walter Scott's Great Writers Series, seem to me to spend their time in trying to explain their divinity away. Where one had hoped that Browning was a mystic, they have sought to show that he was simply inarticulate. Where one had fancied that he had something to conceal, they have proved that he had but little to reveal. But I speak merely of his incoherent work. Taken as a whole, the man was great. He did not belong to the Olympians, and had all the incompleteness of the Titan. He did not survey, and it was but rarely that he could sing. His work is marred by struggle, violence and effort, and he passed not from emotion to form, but from thought to chaos. Still, he was great. He has been called a thinker, and was certainly a man who was always thinking, and always thinking aloud; but it was not thought that fascinated him, but rather the processes by which thought moves. It was the machine he loved, not what the machine makes. The method by which the fool arrives at his folly was as dear to him as the ultimate wisdom of the wise. So much, in-

deed, did the subtle mechanism of mind fascinate him that he despised language, or looked upon it as an incomplete instrument of expression. Rhyme, that exquisite echo which in the Muse's hollow hill creates and answers its own voice; rhyme, which in the hands of the real artist becomes not merely a material element of metrical beauty, but a spiritual element of thought and passion also, waking a new mood, it may be, or stirring a fresh train of ideas, or opening by mere sweetness and suggestion of sound some golden door at which the Imagination itself had knocked in vain; rhyme, which can turn man's utterance to the speech of gods; rhyme, the one chord we have added to the Greek lyre, became in Robert Browning's hands a grotesque, misshapen thing, which at times made him masquerade in poetry as a low comedian, and ride Pegasus too often with his tongue in his cheek. There are moments when he wounds us by monstrous music. Nay, if he can only get his music by breaking the strings of his lute, he breaks them, and they snap in discord, and no Athenian tettix, making melody from tremulous wings, lights on the ivory horn to make the movement perfect, or the interval less harsh. Yet, he was great: and though he turned language into ignoble clay, he

made from it men and women that live. He is the most Shakespearian creature since Shakespeare. If Shakespeare could sing with myriad lips, Browning could stammer through a thousand mouths. Even now, as I am speaking, and speaking not against him but for him, there glides through the room the pageant of his persons. There, creeps Fra Lippo Lippi with his cheeks still burning from some girl's hot kiss. There, stands dread Saul with the lordly male-sapphires gleaming in his turban. Mildred Tresham is there, and the Spanish monk, yellow with hatred, and Blougram, and Ben Ezra, and the Bishop of St. Praxed's. The spawn of Setebos gibbers in the corner, and Sebald, hearing Pippa pass by, looks on Ottima's haggard face, and loathes her and his own sin, and himself. Pale as the white satin of his doublet, the melancholy king watches with dreamy treacherous eyes too loyal Strafford pass forth to his doom, and Andrea shudders as he hears the cousins whistle in the garden, and bids his perfect wife go down. Yes, Browning was great. And as what will he be remembered? As a poet? Ah, not as a poet! He will be remembered as a writer of fiction, as the most supreme writer of fiction, it may be, that we have ever had. His sense of dramatic situation

was unrivalled, and, if he could not answer his own problems, he could at least put problems forth, and what more should an artist do? Considered from the point of view of a creator of character he ranks next to him who made Hamlet. Had he been articulate, he might have sat beside him. The only man who can touch the hem of his garment is George Meredith. Meredith is a prose Browning, and so is Browning. He used poetry as a medium for writing in prose.

Ernest. There is something in what you say, but there is not everything in what you say. In many points you are unjust.

Gilbert. It is difficult not to be unjust to what one loves. But let us return to the particular point at issue. What was it that you said?

Ernest. Simply this: that in the best days of art there were no art-critics.

Gilbert. I seem to have heard that observation before, Ernest. It has all the vitality of error and all the tediousness of an old friend.

Ernest. It is true. Yes: there is no use your tossing your head in that petulant manner. It is quite true. In the best days of art there were no art-critics. The sculptor hewed from the marble block the great white-limbed Hermes that slept

within it. The waxers and gilders of images gave tone and texture to the statue, and the world, when it saw it, worshipped and was dumb. He poured the glowing bronze into the mould of sand, and the river of red metal cooled into noble curves and took the impress of the body of a god. With enamel or polished jewels he gave sight to the sightless eyes. The hyacinth-like curls grew crisp beneath his graver. And when, in some dim frescoed fane, or pillared sunlit portico, the child of Leto stood upon his pedestal, those who passed by, *ἁβρῶς βαίνοντες διὰ λαμπροτάτου αἰθέρος*, became conscious of a new influence that had come across their lives, and dreamily, or with a sense of strange and quickening joy, went to their homes or daily labour, or wandered, it may be, through the city gates to that nymph-haunted meadow where young Phædrus bathed his feet, and, lying there on the soft grass, beneath the tall wind-whispering planes and flowering *agnus castus*, began to think of the wonder of beauty, and grew silent with unaccustomed awe. In those days the artist was free. From the river valley he took the fine clay in his fingers, and with a little tool of wood or bone, fashioned it into forms so exquisite that the people gave them to the dead as their

playthings, and we find them still in the dusty tombs on the yellow hillside by Tanagra, with the faint gold and the fading crimson still lingering about hair and lips and raiment. On a wall of fresh plaster, stained with bright sandyx or mixed with milk and saffron, he pictured one who trod with tired feet the purple white-starred fields of asphodel, one "in whose eyelids lay the whole of the Trojan War," Polyxena, the daughter of Priam; or figured Odysseus, the wise and cunning, bound by tight cords to the mast-step, that he might listen without hurt to the singing of the Sirens, or wandering by the clear river of Acheron, where the ghosts of fishes flitted over the pebbly bed; or showed the Persian in trews or mitre flying before the Greek at Marathon, or the galleys clashing their beaks of brass in the little Salaminian bay. He drew with silver-point and charcoal upon parchment and prepared cedar. Upon ivory and rose-coloured terra-cotta he painted with wax, making the wax fluid with juice of olives, and with heated irons making it firm. Panel and marble and linen canvas became wonderful as his brush swept across them; and life, seeing her own image, was still, and dared not speak. All life, indeed, was his, from the merchants seated in the

market-place to the cloaked shepherd lying on the hill; from the nymph hidden in the laurels and the faun that pipes at noon, to the king whom, in long green-curtained litter, slaves bore upon oil-bright shoulders, and fanned with peacock fans. Men and women, with pleasure or sorrow in their faces, passed before him. He watched them, and their secret became his. Through form and colour he recreated a world.

All subtle arts belonged to him also. He held the gem against the revolving disk, and the amethyst became the purple couch for Adonis, and across the veined sardonyx sped Artemis with her hounds. He beat out the gold into roses, and strung them together for necklace or armlet. He beat out the gold into wreaths for the conqueror's helmet, or into palmates for the Tyrian robe, or into masks for the royal dead. On the back of the silver mirror he graved Thetis borne by her Nereids, or love-sick Phædra with her nurse, or Persephone, weary of memory, putting poppies in her hair. The potter sat in his shed, and, flower-like from the silent wheel, the vase rose up beneath his hands. He decorated the base and stem and ears with pattern of dainty olive-leaf, or foliated acanthus, or curved and crested wave. Then

in black or red he painted lads wrestling, or in the race: knights in full armour, with strange heraldic shields and curious visors, leaning from shell-shaped chariot over rearing steeds: the gods seated at the feast or working their miracles: the heroes in their victory or in their pain. Sometimes he would etch in thin vermilion lines upon a ground of white the languid bridegroom and his bride, with Eros hovering round them—an Eros like one of Donatello's angels, a little laughing thing with gilded or with azure wings. On the curved side he would write the name of his friend. *ΚΑΛΟΣ ΑΛΚΙΒΙΑΔΗΣ* or *ΚΑΛΟΣ ΧΑΡΜΙΔΗΣ* tells us the story of his days. Again, on the rim of the wide flat cup he would draw the stag browsing, or the lion at rest, as his fancy willed it. From the tiny perfume-bottle laughed Aphrodite at her toilet, and, with bare-limbed Mænads in his train, Dionysius danced round the wine-jar on naked must-stained feet, while, satyr-like, the old Silenus sprawled upon the bloated skins, or shook that magic spear which was tipped with a fretted fir-cone, and wreathed with dark ivy. And no one came to trouble the artist at his work. No irresponsible chatter disturbed him. He was not worried by opinions. By the Ilyssus, says Arnold some-

where, there was no Higginbotham. By the Ilyssus, my dear Gilbert, there were no silly art-congresses, bringing provincialism to the provinces and teaching the mediocrity how to mouth. By the Ilyssus there were no tedious magazines about art, in which the industrious prattle of what they do not understand. On the reed-grown banks of that little stream strutted no ridiculous journalism monopolising the seat of judgment when it should be apologising in the dock. The Greeks had no art-critics.

Gilbert. Ernest, you are quite delightful, but your views are terribly unsound. I am afraid that you have been listening to the conversation of some one older than yourself. That is always a dangerous thing to do, and if you allow it to degenerate into a habit, you will find it absolutely fatal to any intellectual development. As for modern journalism, it is not my business to defend it. It justifies its own existence by the great Darwinian principle of the survival of the vulgarest. I have merely to do with literature.

Ernest. But what is the difference between literature and journalism?

Gilbert. Oh! journalism is unreadable, and literature is not read. That is all. But with regard

to your statement that the Greeks had no art-critics, I assure you that is quite absurd. It would be more just to say that the Greeks were a nation of art-critics.

Ernest. Really?

Gilbert. Yes, a nation of art-critics. But I don't wish to destroy the delightfully unreal picture that you have drawn of the relation of the Hellenic artist to the intellectual spirit of his age. To give an accurate description of what has never occurred is not merely the proper occupation of the historian, but the inalienable privilege of any man of parts and culture. Still less do I desire to talk learnedly. Learned conversation is either the affectation of the ignorant or the profession of the mentally unemployed. And, as for what is called improving conversation, that is merely the foolish method by which the still more foolish philanthropist feebly tries to disarm the just rancour of the criminal classes. No: let me play to you some mad scarlet thing by Dvorák. The pallid figures on the tapestry are smiling at us, and the heavy eyelids of my bronze Narcissus are folded in sleep. Don't let us discuss anything solemnly. I am but too conscious of the fact that we are born in an age when only the dull are treated seriously, and

I live in terror of not being misunderstood. Don't degrade me into the position of giving you useful information. Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught. Through the parted curtains of the window I see the moon like a clipped piece of silver. Like gilded bees the stars cluster round her. The sky is a hard hollow sapphire. Let us go out into the night. Thought is wonderful, but adventure is more wonderful still. Who knows but we may meet Prince Florizel of Bohemia, and hear the fair Cuban tell us that she is not what she seems?

Ernest. You are horribly wilful. I insist on your discussing the matter with me. You have said that the Greeks were a nation of art-critics. What art-criticism have they left us?

Gilbert. My dear Ernest, even if not a single fragment of art-criticism had come down to us from Hellenic or Hellenistic days, it would be none the less true that the Greeks were a nation of art-critics, and that they invented the criticism of art just as they invented the criticism of everything else. For, after all, what is our primary debt to the Greeks? Simply the critical spirit. And, this spirit, which they exercised on questions of

religion and science, of ethics and metaphysics, of politics and education, they exercised on questions of art also, and, indeed, of the two supreme and highest arts, they have left us the most flawless system of criticism that the world has ever seen.

Ernest. But what are the two supreme and highest arts?

Gilbert. Life and Literature, life and the perfect expression of life. The principles of the former, as laid down by the Greeks, we may not realise in an age so marred by false ideals as our own. The principles of the latter, as they laid them down, are, in many cases, so subtle that we can hardly understand them. Recognising that the most perfect art is that which most fully mirrors man in all his infinite variety, they elaborated the criticism of language, considered in the light of the mere material of that art, to a point to which we, with our accentual system of reasonable or emotional emphasis, can barely if at all attain; studying, for instance, the metrical movements of a prose as scientifically as a modern musician studies harmony and counterpoint, and, I need hardly say, with much keener æsthetic instinct. In this they were right, as they were right in all

things. Since the introduction of printing, and the fatal development of the habit of reading amongst the middle and lower classes of this country, there has been a tendency in literature to appeal more and more to the eye, and less and less to the ear, which is really the sense which, from the standpoint of pure art, it should seek to please, and by whose canons of pleasure it should abide always. Even the work of Mr. Pater, who is, on the whole, the most perfect master of English prose now creating amongst us, is often far more like a piece of mosaic than a passage in music, and seems, here and there, to lack the true rhythmical life of words and the fine freedom and richness of effect that such rhythmical life produces. We, in fact, have made writing a definite mode of composition, and have treated it as a form of elaborate design. The Greeks, upon the other hand, regarded writing simply as a method of chronicling. Their test was always the spoken word in its musical and metrical relations. The voice was the medium, and the ear the critic. I have sometimes thought that the story of Homer's blindness might be really an artistic myth, created in critical days, and serving to remind us, not merely that the great poet is always a seer, seeing

less with the eyes of the body than he does with the eyes of the soul, but that he is a true singer also, building his song out of music, repeating each line over and over again to himself till he has caught the secret of its melody, chaunting in darkness the words that are winged with light. Certainly, whether this be so or not, it was to his blindness, as an occasion if not as a cause, that England's great poet owed much of the majestic movement and sonorous splendour of his later verse. When Milton could no longer write, he began to sing. Who would match the measures of *Comus* with the measures of *Samson Agonistes,* or of *Paradise Lost* or *Regained?* When Milton became blind he composed, as everyone should compose, with the voice purely, and so the pipe or reed of earlier days became that mighty, many-stopped organ whose rich, reverberant music has all the stateliness of Homeric verse, if it seeks not to have its swiftness, and is the one imperishable inheritance of English literature, sweeping through all the ages, because above them, and abiding with us ever, being immortal in its form. Yes: writing has done much harm to writers. We must return to the voice. That must be our test, and

perhaps then we shall be able to appreciate some of the subtleties of Greek art criticism.

As it is, we cannot do so. Sometimes, when I have written a piece of prose that I have been modest enough to consider absolutely free from fault, a dreadful thought comes over me that I may have been guilty of the immoral effeminacy of using trochaic and tribrachic movements, a crime for which a learned critic of the Augustan age censures with most just severity the brilliant if somewhat paradoxical Hegesias. I grow cold when I think of it, and wonder to myself if the admirable ethical effect of the prose of that charming writer, who once, in a spirit of reckless generosity towards the uncultivated portion of our community, proclaimed the monstrous doctrine that conduct is three-fourths of life, will not some day be entirely annihilated by the discovery that the pæons have been wrongly placed.

Ernest. Ah! now you are flippant.

Gilbert. Who would not be flippant when he is gravely told that the Greeks had no art critics? I can understand it being said that the constructive genius of the Greeks lost itself in criticism, but not that the race to whom we owe the critical spirit did not criticise. You will not ask me to

give you a survey of Greek art criticism from Plato to Plotinus. The night is too lovely for that, and the moon, if she heard us, would put more ashes on her face than are there already. But think merely of one perfect little work of æsthetic criticism, Aristotle's *Treatise on Poetry*. It is not perfect in form, for it is badly written, consisting perhaps of notes jotted down for an art lecture, or of isolated fragments destined for some larger book, but in temper and treatment it is perfect absolutely. The ethical effect of art, its importance to culture, and its place in the formation of character, had been done once for all by Plato; but here we have art treated, not from the moral, but from the purely æsthetic point of view. Plato had, of course, dealt with many definitely artistic subjects, such as the importance of unity in a work of art, the necessity for tone and harmony, the æsthetic value of appearances, the relation of the visible arts to the external world, and the relation of fiction to fact. He first perhaps stirred in the soul of man that desire which we have not yet satisfied, the desire to know the connection between Beauty and Truth, and the place of Beauty in the moral and intellectual order of the Kosmos. The problems of idealism and realism, as he sets them

forth, may seem to many to be somewhat barren of result in the metaphysical sphere of abstract being in which he places them, but transfer them to the sphere of art, and you will find that they are still vital and full of meaning. It may be that it is as a critic of Beauty that Plato is destined to live, and that by altering the name of the sphere of his speculation we shall find a new philosophy. But Aristotle, like Goethe, deals with art primarily in its concrete manifestations, taking Tragedy, for instance, and investigating the material it uses, which is language, its subject-matter, which is life, the method by which it works, which is action, the conditions under which it reveals itself, which are those of theatric presentation, its logical structure, which is plot, and its final æsthetic appeal, which is to the sense of beauty realised through the passions of pity and awe. That purification and spiritualising of the nature which he calls *κάθαρσις* is, as Goethe saw, essentially æsthetic, and is not moral, as Lessing fancied. Concerning himself primarily with the impression that the work of art produces, Aristotle sets himself to analyse that impression, to investigate its source, to see how it is engendered. As a physiologist and psychologist, he knows that the health of a function re-

sides in energy. To have a capacity for passion and not to realise it, is to make oneself incomplete and limited. The mimic spectacle of life that Tragedy affords cleanses the bosom of much "perilous stuff," and by presenting high and worthy objects for the exercise of the emotions, purifies and spiritualises the man; nay, not merely does it spiritualise him, but it initiates him also into noble feelings of which he might else have known nothing, the word *κάθαρσις* having, it has sometimes seemed to me, a definite allusion to the rite of initiation, if indeed that be not, as I am occasionally tempted to fancy, its true and only meaning here. This is, of course, a mere outline of the book. But you see what a perfect piece of æsthetic criticism it is. Who, indeed, but a Greek could have analysed art so well? After reading it, one does not wonder any longer that Alexandria devoted itself so largely to art criticism, and that we find the artistic temperaments of the day investigating every question of style and manner, discussing the great Academic schools of painting, for instance, such as the school of Sicyon, that sought to preserve the dignified traditions of the antique mode, or the realistic and impressionist schools, that aimed at reproducing actual life, or

the elements of ideality in portraiture, or the artistic value of the epic form in an age so modern as theirs, or the proper subject-matter for the artist. Indeed, I fear that the inartistic temperaments of the day busied themselves also in matters of literature and art, for the accusations of plagiarism were endless, and such accusations proceed either from the thin, colourless lips of impotence, or from the grotesque mouths of those who, possessing nothing of their own, fancy that they can gain a reputation for wealth by crying out that they have been robbed. And I assure you, my dear Ernest, that the Greeks chattered about painters quite as much as people do nowadays, and had their private views, and shilling exhibitions, and Arts and Crafts guilds, and pre-Raphaelite movements, and movements towards realism, and lectured about art, and wrote essays on art, and produced their art-historians, and their archæologists, and all the rest of it. Why, even the theatrical managers of travelling companies brought their dramatic critics with them when they went on tour, and paid them very handsome salaries for writing laudatory notices. Whatever, in fact, is modern in our life we owe to the Greeks. Whatever is an anachronism is due to mediævalism.

It is the Greeks who have given us the whole system of art criticism, and how fine their critical instinct was, may be seen from the fact that the material they criticised with most care was, as I have already said, language. For the material that painter or sculptor uses is meagre in comparison with that of words. Words have not merely music as sweet as that of viol and lute, colour as rich and vivid as any that makes lovely for us the canvas of the Venetian or the Spaniard, and plastic form no less sure and certain than that which reveals itself in marble or in bronze, but thought and passion and spirituality are theirs also, are theirs, indeed, alone. If the Greeks had criticised nothing but language they would still have been the great art critics of the world. To know the principles of the highest art, is to know the principles of all the arts.

But I see that the moon is hiding behind a sulphur-coloured cloud. Out of a tawny mane of drift she gleams like a lion's eye. She is afraid that I will talk to you of Lucian and Longinus, of Quintilian and Dionysius, of Pliny and Fronto and Pausanias, of all those who in the antique world wrote or lectured upon art matters. She need not be afraid. I am tired of my expedi-

tion into the dim, dull abyss of facts. There is nothing left for me now but the divine μονόχρονος ἡδονή of another cigarette. Cigarettes have at least the charm of leaving one unsatisfied.

Ernest. Try one of mine. They are rather good. I get them direct from Cairo. The only use of our *attachés* is that they supply their friends with excellent tobacco. And as the moon has hidden herself, let us talk a little longer. I am quite ready to admit that I was wrong in what I said about the Greeks. They were, as you have pointed out, a nation of art critics. I acknowledge it, and I feel a little sorry for them. For the creative faculty is higher than the critical. There is really no comparison between them.

Gilbert. The antithesis between them is entirely arbitrary. Without the critical faculty, there is no artistic creation at all worthy of the name. You spoke a little while ago of that fine spirit of choice and delicate instinct of selection by which the artist realises life for us, and gives to it a momentary perfection. Well, that spirit of choice, that subtle tact of omission, is really the critical faculty in one of its most characteristic moods, and no one who does not possess this critical faculty can create anything at all in art. Arnold's definition of

literature as a criticism of life, was not very felicitous in form, but it showed how keenly he recognised the importance of the critical element in all creative work.

Ernest. I should have said that great artists worked unconsciously, that they were "wiser than they knew," as, I think, Emerson remarks somewhere.

Gilbert. It is really not so, Ernest. All fine imaginative work is self-conscious and deliberate. No poet sings because he must sing. At least, no great poet does. A great poet sings because he chooses to sing. It is so now, and it has always been so. We are sometimes apt to think that the voices that sounded at the dawn of poetry were simpler, fresher, and more natural than ours, and that the world which the early poets looked at, and through which they walked, had a kind of poetical quality of its own, and almost without changing could pass into song. The snow lies thick now upon Olympus, and its steep, scarped sides are bleak and barren, but once, we fancy, the white feet of the Muses brushed the dew from the anemones in the morning, and at evening came Apollo to sing to the shepherds in the vale. But in this we are merely lending to other ages what we de-

sire, or think we desire, for our own. Our historical sense is at fault. Every century that produces poetry is, so far, an artificial century, and the work that seems to us to be the most natural and simple product of its time is always the result of the most self-conscious effort. Believe me, Ernest, there is no fine art without self-consciousness, and self-consciousness and the critical spirit are one.

Ernest. I see what you mean, and there is much in it. But surely you would admit that the great poems of the early world, the primitive, anonymous collective poems, were the result of the imagination of races, rather than of the imagination of individuals?

Gilbert. Not when they became poetry. Not when they received a beautiful form. For there is no art where there is no style, and no style where there is no unity, and unity is of the individual. No doubt Homer had old ballads and stories to deal with, as Shakespeare had chronicles and plays and novels from which to work, but they were merely his rough material. He took them and shaped them into song. They became his, because he made them lovely. They were built out of music,

And so not built at all,
And therefore built for ever.

The longer one studies life and literature, the more strongly one feels that behind everything that is wonderful stands the individual, and that it is not the moment that makes the man, but the man who creates the age. Indeed, I am inclined to think that each myth and legend that seems to us to spring out of the wonder, or terror, or fancy of tribe and nation, was in its origin the invention of one single mind. The curiously limited number of the myths seems to me to point to this conclusion. But we must not go off into questions of comparative mythology. We must keep to criticism. And what I want to point out is this. An age that has no criticism is either an age in which art is immobile, hieratic, and confined to the reproduction of formal types, or an age that possesses no art at all. There have been critical ages that have not been creative, in the ordinary sense of the word, ages in which the spirit of man has sought to set in order the treasures of his treasure-house, to separate the gold from the silver, and the silver from the lead, to count over the jewels, and to give names to the pearls. But there has never been a creative age that has not been criti-

cal also. For it is the critical faculty that invents fresh forms. The tendency of creation is to repeat itself. It is to the critical instinct that we owe each new school that springs up, each new mould that art finds ready to its hand. There is really not a single form that art now uses that does not come to us from the critical spirit of Alexandria, where these forms were either stereotyped, or invented, or made perfect. I say Alexandria, not merely because it was there that the Greek spirit became most self-conscious, and indeed ultimately expired in scepticism and theology, but because it was to that city, and not to Athens, that Rome turned for her models, and it was through the survival, such as it was, of the Latin language that culture lived at all. When, at the Renaissance, Greek literature dawned upon Europe, the soil had been in some measure prepared for it. But to get rid of the details of history, which are always wearisome, and usually inaccurate, let us say generally that the forms of art have been due to the Greek critical spirit. To it we owe the epic, the lyric, the entire drama in every one of its developments, including burlesque, the idyll, the romantic novel, the novel of adventure, the essay, the dialogue, the oration, the lecture,

for which perhaps we should not forgive them, and the epigram, in all the wide meaning of that word. In fact, we owe it everything, except the sonnet, to which, however, some curious parallels of thought movement may be traced in the Anthology, American journalism, to which no parallel can be found anywhere, and the ballad in sham Scotch dialect, which one of our most industrious writers has recently proposed should be made the basis for a final and unanimous effort on the part of our second-rate poets to make themselves really romantic. Each new school, as it appears, cries out against criticism, but it is to the critical faculty in man that it owes its origin. The mere creative instinct does not innovate, but reproduces.

Ernest. You have been talking of criticism as an essential part of the creative spirit, and I now fully accept your theory. But what of criticism outside creation? I have a foolish habit of reading periodicals, and it seems to me that most modern criticism is perfectly valueless.

Gilbert. So is most modern creative work, also. Mediocrity weighing mediocrity in the balance, and incompetence applauding its brother—that is the spectacle which the artistic activity of England

affords us from time to time. And yet, I feel I am a little unfair in this matter. As a rule, the critics—I speak, of course, of the higher class, of those, in fact, who write for the sixpenny papers—are far more cultured than the people whose work they are called upon to review. This is, indeed, only what one would expect, for criticism demands infinitely more cultivation than creation does.

Ernest. Really?

Gilbert. Certainly. Anybody can write a three-volumed novel. It merely requires a complete ignorance of both life and literature. The difficulty that I should fancy the reviewer feels is the difficulty of sustaining any standard. Where there is no style a standard must be impossible. The poor reviewers are apparently reduced to be the reporters of the police court of literature, the chroniclers of the doings of the habitual criminals of art. It is sometimes said of them that they do not read all through the works they are called upon to criticise. They do not. Or at least they should not. If they did so, they would become confirmed misanthropes; or, if I may borrow a phrase from one of the pretty Newnham graduates, confirmed womanthropes for the rest of their

lives. Nor is it necessary. To know the vintage and quality of a wine one need not drink the whole cask. It must be perfectly easy in half an hour to say whether a book is worth anything or worth nothing. Ten minutes are really sufficient, if one has the instinct for form. Who wants to wade through a dull volume? One tastes it, and that is quite enough—more than enough, I should imagine. I am aware that there are many honest workers in painting as well as in literature who object to criticism entirely. They are quite right. Their work stands in no intellectual relation to their age. It brings us no new element of pleasure. It suggests no fresh departure of thought, or passion, or beauty. It should not be spoken of. It should be left to the oblivion that it deserves.

Ernest. But, my dear fellow—excuse me for interrupting you—you seem to me to be allowing your passion for criticism to lead you a great deal too far. For, after all, even you must admit that it is much more difficult to do a thing than to talk about it.

Gilbert. More difficult to do a thing than to talk about it? Not at all. That is a gross popular error. It is very much more difficult to talk

about a thing than to do it. In the sphere of actual life that is, of course, obvious. Anybody can make history. Only a great man can write it. There is no mode of action, no form of emotion, that we do not share with the lower animals. It is only by language that we rise above them, or above each other—by language, which is the parent, and not the child, of thought. Action, indeed, is always easy, and when presented to us in its most aggravated, because most continuous form, which I take to be that of real industry, becomes simply the refuge of people who have nothing whatsoever to do. No, Ernest, don't talk about action. It is a blind thing, dependent on external influences, and moved by an impulse of whose nature it is unconscious. It is a thing incomplete in its essence, because limited by accident, and ignorant of its direction, being always at variance with its aim. Its basis is the lack of imagination. It is the last resource of those who know not how to dream.

Ernest. Gilbert, you treat the world as if it were a crystal ball. You hold it in your hand, and reverse it to please a wilful fancy. You do nothing but rewrite history.

Gilbert. The one duty we owe to history is to

rewrite it. That is not the least of the tasks in store for the critical spirit. When we have fully discovered the scientific laws that govern life we shall realise that the one person who has more illusions than the dreamer is the man of action. He, indeed, knows neither the origin of his deeds nor their results. From the field in which he thought that he had sown thorns we have gathered our vintage, and the fig-tree that he planted for our pleasure is as barren as the thistle, and more bitter. It is because Humanity has never known where it was going that it has been able to find its way.

Ernest. You think, then, that in the sphere of action a conscious aim is a delusion?

Gilbert. It is worse than a delusion. If we lived long enough to see the results of our actions, it may be that those who call themselves good would be sickened with a dull remorse, and those whom the world calls evil stirred by a noble joy. Each little thing that we do passes into the great machine of life, which may grind our virtues to powder and make them worthless, or transform our sins into elements of a new civilisation, more marvellous and more splendid than any that has gone before. But men are the slaves of words. They

rage against Materialism, as they call it, forgetting that there has been no material improvement that has not spiritualised the world, and that there have been few, if any, spiritual awakenings that have not wasted the world's faculties in barren hopes, and fruitless aspirations, and empty or trammelling creeds. What is termed Sin is an essential element of progress. Without it the world would stagnate, or grow old, or become colourless. By its curiosity, Sin increases the experience of the race. Through its intensified assertion of individualism it saves us from monotony of type. In its rejection of the current notions about morality, it is one with the higher ethics. And as for the virtues! What are the virtues? Nature, M. Renan tells us, cares little about chastity, and it may be that it is to the shame of the Magdalen, and not to their own purity, that the Lucretias of modern life owe their freedom from stain. Charity, as even those of whose religion it makes a formal part have been compelled to acknowledge, creates a multitude of evils. The mere existence of conscience, that faculty of which people prate so much nowadays, and are so ignorantly proud, is a sign of our imperfect development. It must be merged in instinct before we become fine. Self-

denial is simply a method by which man arrests his progress, and self-sacrifice a survival of the mutilation of the savage, part of that old worship of pain which is so terrible a factor in the history of the world, and which even now makes its victims day by day, and has its altars in the land. Virtues! Who knows what the virtues are? Not you. Not I. Not any one. It is well for our vanity that we slay the criminal, for if we suffered him to live he might show us what we had gained by his crime. It is well for his peace that the saint goes to his martyrdom. He is spared the sight of the horror of his harvest.

Ernest. Gilbert, you sound too harsh a note. Let us go back to the more gracious fields of literature. What was it you said? That it was more difficult to talk about a thing than to do it?

Gilbert (after a pause). Yes: I believe I ventured upon that simple truth. Surely you see now that I am right? When man acts he is a puppet. When he describes, he is a poet. The whole secret lies in that. It was easy enough on the sandy plains by windy Ilion to send the notched arrow from the painted bow, to hurl against the shield of hide and flame-like brass the long, ash-handled spear. It was easy for the adulterous queen

to spread the Tyrian carpets for her lord, and then, as he lay couched in the marble bath, to throw over his head the purple net, and call to her smooth-faced lover to stab through the meshes at the heart that should have broken at Aulis. For Antigone even, with Death waiting for her as her bridegroom, it was easy to pass through the tainted air at noon, and climb the hill, and strew with kindly earth the wretched naked corse that had no tomb. But what of those who wrote about these things? What of those who gave them reality, and made them live for ever? Are they not greater than the men and women they sing of? "Hector, that sweet knight, is dead," and Lucian tells us how in the dim underworld Menippus saw the bleaching skull of Helen, and marvelled that it was for so grim a favour that all those horned ships were launched, those beautiful mailed men laid low, those towered cities brought to dust. Yet every day the swan-like daughter of Leda comes out on the battlements, and looks down at the tide of war. The greybeards wonder at her loveliness, and she stands by the side of the king. In his chamber of stained ivory lies her leman. He is polishing his dainty armour, and combing the scarlet plume. With squire and page, her hus-

band passes from tent to tent. She can see his bright hair, and hears, or fancies that she hears, that clear, cold voice. In the courtyard below, the son of Priam is buckling on his brazen cuirass. The white arms of Andromache are around his neck. He sets his helmet on the ground, lest their babe should be frightened. Behind the embroidered curtains of his pavilion sits Achilles, in perfumed raiment, while in harness of gilt and silver the friend of his soul arrays himself to go forth to the fight. From a curiously carven chest that his mother Thetis had brought to his ship-side, the Lord of the Myrmidons takes out that mystic chalice that the lip of man had never touched, and cleanses it with brimstone, and with fresh water cools it, and, having washed his hands, fills with black wine its burnished hollow, and spills the thick grape-blood upon the ground in honour of Him whom at Dodona barefooted prophets worshipped, and prays to Him, and knows not that he prays in vain, and that by the hands of two knights from Troy, Panthous' son, Euphorbus, whose love-locks were looped with gold, and the Priamid, the lion-hearted, Patroklus, the comrade of comrades, must meet his doom. Phantoms, are they? Heroes of mist and mountain? Shadows

in a song? No: they are real. Action! What is action? It dies at the moment of its energy. It is a base concession to fact. The world is made by the singer for the dreamer.

Ernest. While you talk it seems to me to be so.

Gilbert. It is so in truth. On the mouldering citadel of Troy lies the lizard like a thing of green bronze. The owl has built her nest in the palace of Priam. Over the empty plain wander shepherd and goatherd with their flocks, and where, on the wine-surfaced, oily sea, οἴνοψ πόντος, as Homer calls it, copper-prowed and streaked with vermilion, the great galleys of the Danaoi came in their gleaming crescent, the lonely tunny-fisher sits in his little boat and watches the bobbing corks of his net. Yet, every morning the doors of the city are thrown open, and on foot, or in horse-drawn chariot, the warriors go forth to battle, and mock their enemies from behind their iron masks. All day long the fight rages, and, when night comes, the torches gleam by the tents and the cresset burns in the hall. Those who live in marble or on painted panel know of life but a single exquisite instant, eternal indeed in its beauty, but limited to one note of passion

or one mood of calm. Those whom the poet makes live have their myriad emotions of joy and terror, of courage and despair, of pleasure and of suffering. The seasons come and go in glad or saddening pageant, and with winged or leaden feet the years pass by before them. They have their youth and their manhood, they are children, and they grow old. It is always dawn for St. Helena, as Veronese saw her at the window. Through the still morning air the angels bring her the symbol of God's pain. The cool breezes of the morning lift the gilt threads from her brow. On that little hill by the city of Florence, where the lovers of Giorgione are lying, it is always the solstice of noon, of noon made so languorous by summer suns that hardly can the slim, naked girl dip into the marble tank the round bubble of clear glass, and the long fingers of the lute-player rest idly upon the chords. It is twilight always for the dancing nymphs whom Corot set free among the silver poplars of France. In eternal twilight they move, those frail, diaphanous figures, whose tremulous white feet seem not to touch the dew-drenched grass they tread on. But those who walk in epos, drama, or romance, see through the labouring months the young moons wax and wane,

and watch the night from evening unto morning star, and from sunrise unto sunsetting can note the shifting day with all its gold and shadow. For them, as for us, the flowers bloom and wither, and the Earth, that Green-tressed Goddess, as Coleridge calls her, alters her raiment for their pleasure. The statue is concentrated to one moment of perfection. The image stained upon the canvas possesses no spiritual element of growth or change. If they know nothing of death, it is because they know little of life, for the secrets of life and death belong to those, and those only, whom the sequence of time affects, and who possess not merely the present but the future, and can rise or fall from a past of glory or of shame. Movement, that problem of the visible arts, can be truly realised by Literature alone. It is Literature that shows us the body in its swiftness and the soul in its unrest.

Ernest. Yes; I see now what you mean. But, surely, the higher you place the creative artist, the lower must the critic rank.

Gilbert. Why so?

Ernest. Because the best that he can give us will be but an echo of rich music, a dim shadow of clear-outlined form. It may, indeed, be that

life is chaos, as you tell me that it is; that its martyrdoms are mean and its heroisms ignoble; and that it is the function of Literature to create, from the rough material of actual existence, a new world that will be more marvellous, more enduring, and more true than the world that common eyes look upon, and through which common natures seek to realise their perfection. But surely, if this new world has been made by the spirit and touch of a great artist, it will be a thing so complete and perfect that there will be nothing left for the critic to do. I quite understand now, and indeed admit most readily, that it is far more difficult to talk about a thing than to do it. But it seems to me that this sound and sensible maxim, which is really extremely soothing to one's feelings, and should be adopted as its motto by every Academy of Literature all over the world, applies only to the relations that exist between Art and Life, and not to any relations that there may be between Art and Criticism.

Gilbert. But, surely, Criticism is itself an art. And just as artistic creation implies the working of the critical faculty, and, indeed, without it cannot be said to exist at all, so Criticism is really

creative in the highest sense of the word. Criticism is, in fact, both creative and independent.

Ernest. Independent?

Gilbert. Yes; independent. Criticism is no more to be judged by any low standard of imitation or resemblance than is the work of poet or sculptor. The critic occupies the same relation to the work of art that he criticises as the artist does to the visible world of form and colour, or the unseen world of passion and of thought. He does not even require for the perfection of his art the finest materials. Anything will serve his purpose. And just as out of the sordid and sentimental amours of the silly wife of a small country doctor in the squalid village of Yonville-l'Abbaye, near Rouen, Gustave Flaubert was able to create a classic, and make a masterpiece of style, so from subjects of little or of no importance, such as the pictures in this year's Royal Academy, or in any year's Royal Academy, for that matter, Mr. Lewis Morris's poems, M. Ohnet's novels, or the plays of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, the true critic can, if it be his pleasure so to direct or waste his faculty of contemplation, produce work that will be flawless in beauty and instinct with intellectual subtlety. Why not? Dulness is always an

irresistible temptation for brilliancy, and stupidity is the permanent *Bestia Trionfans* that calls wisdom from its cave. To an artist so creative as the critic, what does subject-matter signify? No more and no less than it does to the novelist and the painter. Like them, he can find his motives everywhere. Treatment is the test. There is nothing that has not in it suggestion or challenge.

Ernest. But is Criticism really a creative art?

Gilbert. Why should it not be? It works with materials, and puts them into a form that is at once new and delightful. What more can one say of poetry? Indeed, I would call criticism a creation within a creation. For just as the great artists, from Homer and Æschylus, down to Shakespeare and Keats, did not go directly to life for their subject-matter, but sought for it in myth, and legend, and ancient tale, so the critic deals with materials that others have, as it were, purified for him, and to which imaginative form and colour have been already added. Nay, more, I would say that the highest Criticism, being the purest form of personal impression, is, in its way, more creative than creation, as it has least reference to any standard external to itself, and is, in fact, its own reason for existing, and, as the

Greeks would put it, in itself, and to itself, an end. Certainly, it is never trammelled by any shackles of verisimilitude. No ignoble considerations of probability, that cowardly concession to the tedious repetitions of domestic or public life, affect it ever. One may appeal from fiction unto fact. But from the soul there is no appeal.

Ernest. From the soul?

Gilbert. Yes, from the soul. That is what the highest Criticism really is, the record of one's own soul. It is more fascinating than history, as it is concerned simply with oneself. It is more delightful than philosophy, as its subject is concrete and not abstract, real and not vague. It is the only civilised form of autobiography, as it deals not with the events, but with the thoughts of one's life; not with life's physical accidents of deed or circumstance, but with the spiritual moods and imaginative passions of the mind. I am always amused by the silly vanity of those writers and artists of our day who seem to imagine that the primary function of the critic is to chatter about their second-rate work. The best that one can say of most modern creative art is that it is just a little less vulgar than reality, and so the critic, with his fine sense of distinction and

sure instinct of delicate refinement, will prefer to look into the silver mirror or through the woven veil, and will turn his eyes away from the chaos and clamour of actual existence, though the mirror be tarnished and the veil be torn. His sole aim is to chronicle his own impressions. It is for him that pictures are painted, books written, and marble hewn into form.

Ernest. I seem to have heard another theory of Criticism.

Gilbert. Yes: it has been said by one whose gracious memory we all revere, and the music of whose pipe once lured Proserpina from her Sicilian fields, and made those white feet stir, and not in vain, the Cumnor cowslips, that the proper aim of Criticism is to see the object as in itself it really is. But this is a very serious error, and takes no cognisance of Criticism's most perfect form, which is in its essence purely subjective, and seeks to reveal its own secret and not the secret of another. For the highest Criticism deals with art not as expressive, but as impressive, purely.

Ernest. But is that really so?

Gilbert. Of course it is. Who cares whether Mr. Ruskin's views on Turner are sound or not?

What does it matter? That mighty and majestic prose of his, so fervid and so fiery-coloured in its noble eloquence, so rich in its elaborate, symphonic music, so sure and certain, at its best, in subtle choice of word and epithet, is at least as great a work of art as any of those wonderful sunsets that bleach or rot on their corrupted canvases in England's Gallery; greater, indeed, one is apt to think at times, not merely because its equal beauty is more enduring, but on account of the fuller variety of its appeal, soul speaking to soul in those long-cadenced lines, not through form and colour alone, though through these, indeed, completely and without loss, but with intellectual and emotional utterance, with lofty passion and with loftier thought, with imaginative insight, and with poetic aim; greater, I always think, even as Literature is the greater art. Who, again, cares whether Mr. Pater has put into the portrait of Mona Lisa something that Leonardo never dreamed of? The painter may have been merely the slave of an archaic smile, as some have fancied, but whenever I pass into the cool galleries of the Palace of the Louvre, and stand before that strange figure "set in its marble chair in that cirque of fantastic rocks, as in some faint light under sea,"

I murmur to myself, "She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants; and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as St. Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands." And I say to my friend, "The presence that thus so strangely rose beside the waters is expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years man had come to desire"; and he answers me, "Hers is the head upon which all 'the ends of the world are come,' and the eyelids are a little weary."

And so the picture becomes more wonderful to us than it really is, and reveals to us a secret of which, in truth, it knows nothing, and the music of the mystical prose is as sweet in our ears as was that flute-player's music that lent to the lips of La Gioconda those subtle and poisonous curves Do you ask me what Leonardo would have said had any one told him of this picture that "all the

thoughts and experience of the world had etched and moulded there in that which they had of power to refine and make expressive the outward form, the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the reverie of the Middle Age with its spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of the Pagan world, the sins of the Borgias"? He would probably have answered that he had contemplated none of these things, but had concerned himself simply with certain arrangements of lines and masses, and with new and curious colour-harmonies of blue and green. And it is for this very reason that the criticism which I have quoted is criticism of the highest kind. It treats the work of art simply as a starting-point for a new creation. It does not confine itself—let us at least suppose so for the moment—to discovering the real intention of the artist and accepting that as final. And in this it is right, for the meaning of any beautiful created thing is, at least, as much in the soul of him who looks at it as it was in his soul who wrought it. Nay, it is rather the beholder who lends to the beautiful thing its myriad meanings, and makes it marvellous for us, and sets it in some new relation to the age, so that it becomes a vital portion of our lives, and a symbol of

what we pray for, or perhaps of what, having prayed for, we fear that we may receive. The longer I study, Ernest, the more clearly I see that the beauty of the visible arts is, as the beauty of music, impressive primarily, and that it may be marred, and indeed often is so, by any excess of intellectual intention on the part of the artist. For when the work is finished it has, as it were, an independent life of its own, and may deliver a message far other than that which was put into its lips to say. Sometimes, when I listen to the overture of *Tannhäuser*, I seem indeed to see that comely knight treading delicately on the flower-strewn grass, and to hear the voice of Venus calling to him from the caverned hill. But at other times it speaks to me of a thousand different things, of myself, it may be, and my own life, or of the lives of others whom one has loved and grown weary of loving, or of the passions that man has known, or of the passions that man has not known, and so has sought for. To-night it may fill one with that *ΕΡΩΣ ΤΩΝ ΑΔΥΝΑΤΩΝ*, that *Amour de l'Impossible*, which falls like a madness on many who think they live securely and out of reach of harm, so that they sicken suddenly with the poison of unlimited desire, and,

in the infinite pursuit of what they may not obtain, grow faint and swoon or stumble. To-morrow, like the music of which Aristotle and Plato tell us, the noble Dorian music of the Greek, it may perform the office of a physician, and give us an anodyne against pain, and heal the spirit that is wounded, and "bring the soul into harmony with all right things." And what is true about music is true about all the arts. Beauty has as many meanings as man has moods. Beauty is the symbol of symbols. Beauty reveals everything, because it expresses nothing. When it shows us itself it shows us the whole fiery-coloured world.

Ernest. But is such work as you have talked about really criticism?

Gilbert. It is the highest Criticism, for it criticises not merely the individual work of art, but Beauty itself, and fills with wonder a form which the artist may have left void, or not understood, or understood incompletely.

Ernest. The highest Criticism, then, is more creative than creation, and the primary aim of the critic is to see the object as in itself it really is not; that is your theory, I believe?

Gilbert. Yes, that is my theory. To the critic the work of art is simply a suggestion for a new

work of his own, that need not necessarily bear any obvious resemblance to the thing it criticises. The one characteristic of a beautiful form is that one can put into it whatever one wishes, and see in it whatever one chooses to see; and the Beauty, that gives to creation its universal and æsthetic element, makes the critic a creator in his turn, and whispers of a thousand different things which were not present in the mind of him who carved the statue or painted the panel or graved the gem.

It is sometimes said by those who understand neither the nature of the highest Criticism nor the charm of the highest Art, that the pictures that the critic loves most to write about are those that belong to the anecdotage of painting, and that deal with scenes taken out of literature or history. But this is not so. Indeed, pictures of this kind are far too intelligible. As a class, they rank with illustrations, and, even considered from this point of view, are failures, as they do not stir the imagination, but set definite bounds to it. For the domain of the painter is, as I suggested before, widely different from that of the poet. To the latter belongs life in its full and absolute entirety; not merely the beauty that men look at, but the beauty that men listen to also; not merely the

momentary grace of form or the transient gladness of colour, but the whole sphere of feeling, the perfect cycle of thought. The painter is so far limited that it is only through the mask of the body that he can show us the mystery of the soul; only through conventional images that he can handle ideas; only through its physical equivalents that he can deal with psychology. And how inadequately does he do it then, asking us to accept the torn turban of the Moor for the noble rage of Othello, or a dotard in a storm for the wild madness of Lear! Yet it seems as if nothing could stop him. Most of our elderly English painters spend their wicked and wasted lives in poaching upon the domain of the poets, marring their motives by clumsy treatment, and striving to render, by visible form or colour, the marvel of what is invisible, the splendour of what is not seen. Their pictures are, as a natural consequence, insufferably tedious. They have degraded the visible arts into the obvious arts, and the one thing not worth looking at is the obvious. I do not say that poet and painter may not treat of the same subject. They have always done so, and will always do so. But while the poet can be pictorial or not, as he chooses, the painter must be pictorial always. For a paint-

er is limited, not to what he sees in nature, but to what upon canvas may be seen.

And so, my dear Ernest, pictures of this kind will not really fascinate the critic. He will turn from them to such works as make him brood and dream and fancy, to works that possess the subtle quality of suggestion, and seem to tell one that even from them there is an escape into a wider world. It is sometimes said that the tragedy of an artist's life is that he cannot realise his ideal. But the true tragedy that dogs the steps of most artists is that they realise their ideal too absolutely. For, when the ideal is realised, it is robbed of its wonder and its mystery, and becomes simply a new starting point for an ideal that is other than itself. This is the reason why music is the perfect type of art. Music can never reveal its ultimate secret. This, also, is the explanation of the value of limitations in art. The sculptor gladly surrenders imitative colour, and the painter the actual dimensions of form, because by such renunciations they are able to avoid too definite a presentation of the Real, which would be mere imitation, and too definite a realisation of the Ideal, which would be too purely intellectual. It is through its very incompleteness that Art becomes complete in beau-

ty, and so addresses itself, not to the faculty of recognition nor to the faculty of reason, but to the æsthetic sense alone, which, while accepting both reason and recognition as stages of apprehension, subordinates them both to a pure synthetic impression of the work of art as a whole, and, taking whatever alien emotional elements the work may possess, uses their very complexity as a means by which a richer unity may be added to the ultimate impression itself. You see, then, how it is that the æsthetic critic rejects those obvious modes of art that have but one message to deliver, and having delivered it becomes dumb and sterile, and seeks rather for such modes as suggest reverie and mood, and by their imaginative beauty make all interpretations true and no interpretation final. Some resemblance, no doubt, the creative work of the critic will have to the work that has stirred him to creation, but it will be such resemblance as exists, not between Nature and the mirror that the painter of landscape or figure may be supposed to hold up to her, but between Nature and the work of the decorative artist. Just as on the flowerless carpets of Persia, tulip and rose blossom indeed, and are lovely to look on, though they are not reproduced in visible shape or line; just

as the pearl and purple of the sea-shell is echoed in the church of St. Mark at Venice; just as the vaulted ceiling of the wondrous chapel of Ravenna is made gorgeous by the gold and green and sapphire of the peacock's tail, though the birds of Juno fly not across it; so the critic reproduces the work that he criticises in a mode that is never imitative, and part of whose charm may really consist in the rejection of resemblance, and shows us in this way not merely the meaning but also the mystery of Beauty, and, by transforming each art into literature, solves once for all the problem of Art's unity.

But I see it is time for supper. After we have discussed some Chambertin and a few ortolans, we will pass on to the question of the critic considered in the light of the interpreter.

Ernest. Ah! you admit, then, that the critic may occasionally be allowed to see the object as in itself it really is?

Gilbert. I am not quite sure. Perhaps I may admit it after supper. There is a subtle influence in supper.

The Critic as Artist

With Some Remarks Upon the Importance of Doing Nothing

A DIALOGUE. Part II.

Persons: the same. Scene: the same.

Ernest. The ortolans were delightful, and the Chambertin perfect. And now let us return to the point at issue.

Gilbert. Ah! don't let us do that. Conversation should touch everything, but should concentrate itself on nothing. Let us talk about *Moral Indignation, its Cause and Cure,* a subject on which I think of writing: or about *The Survival of Thersites,* as shown by the English comic papers; or about any topic that may turn up.

Ernest. No: I want to discuss the critic and criticism. You have told me that the highest criticism deals with art, not as expressive, but as impressive purely, and is, consequently, both creative and independent; is, in fact, an art by itself, occupying the same relation to creative work that creative work does to the visible world of form and colour, or the unseen world of passion and of thought. Well, now tell me, will not the critic be sometimes a real interpreter?

Gilbert. Yes; the critic will be an interpreter, if he chooses. He can pass from his sympathetic impression of the work of art as a whole, to an analysis or exposition of the work itself, and in this lower sphere, as I hold it to be, there are many delightful things to be said and done. Yet his object will not always be to explain the work of art. He may seek rather to deepen its mystery, to raise round it, and round its maker, that mist of wonder which is dear to both gods and worshippers alike. Ordinary people are "terribly at ease in Zion." They propose to walk arm in arm with the poets, and have a glib, ignorant way of saying, "Why should we read what is written about Shakespeare and Milton? We can read the plays and the poems. That is enough." But an appreciation of Milton is, as the late Rector of Lincoln remarked once, the reward of consummate scholarship. And he who desires to understand Shakespeare truly must understand the relations in which Shakespeare stood to the Renaissance and the Reformation, to the age of Elizabeth and the age of James; he must be familiar with the history of the struggle for supremacy between the old classical forms and the new spirit of romance, between the school of Sidney, and Daniel, and

Jonson, and the school of Marlowe and Marlowe's greater son; he must know the materials that were at Shakespeare's disposal, and the method in which he used them, and the conditions of theatric presentation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, their limitations and their opportunities for freedom, and the literary criticism of Shakespeare's day, its aims and modes and canons; he must study the English language in its progress, and blank or rhymed verse in its various developments; he must study the Greek drama, and the connection between the art of the creator of the Agamemnon and the art of the creator of Macbeth; in a word, he must be able to bind Elizabethan London to the Athens of Pericles, and to learn Shakespeare's true position in the history of European drama and the drama of the world. The critic will certainly be an interpreter, but he will not treat Art as a riddling Sphinx, whose shallow secret may be guessed and revealed by one whose feet are wounded and who knows not his name. Rather, he will look upon Art as a goddess whose mystery it is his province to intensify, and whose majesty his privilege to make more marvellous in the eyes of men.

And here, Ernest, this strange thing happens.

The critic will, indeed, be an interpreter, but he will not be an interpreter in the sense of one who simply repeats in another form a message that has been put into his lips to say. For, just as it is only by contact with the art of foreign nations that the art of a country gains that individual and separate life that we call nationality, so, by curious inversion, it is only by intensifying his own personality that the critic can interpret the personality and work of others, and the more strongly this personality enters into the interpretation the more real the interpretation becomes, the more satisfying, the more convincing, and the more true.

Ernest. I would have said that personality would have been a disturbing element.

Gilbert. No; it is an element of revelation. If you wish to understand others you must intensify your own individualism.

Ernest. What, then, is the result?

Gilbert. I will tell you, and perhaps I can tell you best by definite example. It seems to me that, while the literary critic stands, of course, first, as having the wider range, and larger vision, and nobler material, each of the arts has a critic, as it were, assigned to it. The actor is a critic of the

drama. He shows the poet's work under new conditions, and by a method special to himself. He takes the written word, and action, gesture, and voice become the media of revelation. The singer, or the player on lute and viol, is the critic of music. The etcher of a picture robs the painting of its fair colours, but shows us by the use of a new material its true colour-quality, its tones and values, and the relations of its masses, and so is, in his way, a critic of it, for the critic is he who exhibits to us a work of art in a form different from that of the work itself, and the employment of a new material is a critical as well as a creative element. Sculpture, too, has its critic, who may be either the carver of a gem, as he was in Greek days, or some painter like Mantegna, who sought to reproduce on canvas the beauty of plastic line and the symphonic dignity of processional bas-relief. And in the case of all these creative critics of art it is evident that personality is an absolute essential for any real interpretation. When Rubinstein plays to us the *Sonata Appassionata* of Beethoven, he gives us not merely Beethoven, but also himself, and so gives us Beethoven absolutely —Beethoven reinterpreted through a rich artistic nature, and made vivid and wonderful to us

by a new and intense personality. When a great actor plays Shakespeare we have the same experience. His own individuality becomes a vital part of the interpretation. People sometimes say that actors give us their own Hamlets, and not Shakespeare's; and this fallacy—for it is a fallacy—is, I regret to say, repeated by that charming and graceful writer who has lately deserted the turmoil of literature for the peace of the House of Commons—I mean the author of *Obiter Dicta*. In point of fact, there is no such thing as Shakespeare's Hamlet. If Hamlet has something of the definiteness of a work of art, he has also all the obscurity that belongs to life. There are as many Hamlets as there are melancholies.

Ernest. As many Hamlets as there are melancholies?

Gilbert. Yes: and as art springs from personality, so it is only to personality that it can be revealed, and from the meeting of the two comes right interpretative criticism.

Ernest. The critic, then, considered as the interpreter, will give no less than he receives, and lend as much as he borrows?

Gilbert. He will be always showing us the work of art in some new relation to our age. He will

always be reminding us that great works of art are living things—are, in fact, the only things that live. So much, indeed, will he feel this, that I am certain that, as civilisation progresses and we become more highly organised, the elect spirits of each age, the critical and cultured spirits, will grow less and less interested in actual life, and *will seek to gain their impressions almost entirely from what Art has touched.* For Life is terribly deficient in form. Its catastrophes happen in the wrong way and to the wrong people. There is a grotesque horror about its comedies, and its tragedies seem to culminate in farce. One is always wounded when one approaches it. Things last either too long, or not long enough.

Ernest. Poor life! Poor human life! Are you not even touched by the tears that the Roman poet tells us are part of its essence?

Gilbert. Too quickly touched by them, I fear. For when one looks back upon the life that was so vivid in its emotional intensity, and filled with such fervent moments of ecstasy or of joy, it all seems to be a dream and an illusion. What are the unreal things, but the passions that once burned one like fire? What are the incredible things, but the things that one has faithfully be-

lieved? What are the improbable things? The things that one has done oneself. No, Ernest! life cheats us with shadows, like a puppet-master. We ask it for pleasure. It gives it to us, with bitterness and disappointment in its train. We come across some noble grief that we think will lend the purple dignity of tragedy to our days, but it passes away from us, and things less noble take its place, and on some grey, windy dawn, or odorous eve of silence and of silver, we find ourselves looking with callous wonder, or dull heart of stone, at the tress of gold-flecked hair that we had once so wildly worshipped and so madly kissed.

Ernest. Life, then, is a failure?

Gilbert. From the artistic point of view, certainly. And the chief thing that makes life a failure from this artistic point of view is the thing that lends to life its sordid security, the fact that one can never repeat exactly the same emotion. How different it is in the world of Art! On a shelf of the bookcase behind you stands the *Divine Comedy,* and I know that, if I open it at a certain place, I shall be filled with a fierce hatred of some one who has never wronged me, or stirred by a great love for some one whom I shall never see. There is no mood or passion that Art cannot give

us, and those of us who have discovered her secret can settle beforehand what our experiences are going to be. We can choose our day and select our hour. We can say to ourselves, "To-morrow, at dawn, we shall walk with grave Virgil through the valley of the shadow of death," and lo! the dawn finds us in the obscure wood, and the Mantuan stands by our side. We pass through the gate of the legend fatal to hope, and with pity or with joy behold the horror of another world. The hypocrites go by, with their painted faces and their cowls of gilded lead. Out of the ceaseless winds that drive them, the carnal look at us, and we watch the heretic rending his flesh, and the glutton lashed by the rain. We break the withered branches from the tree in the grove of the Harpies, and each dull-hued, poisonous twig bleeds with red blood before us, and cries aloud with bitter cries. Out of a horn of fire Odysseus speaks to us, and when from his sepulchre of flame the great Ghibelline rises, the pride that triumphs over the torture of that bed becomes ours for a moment. Through the dim purple air fly those who have stained the world with the beauty of their sin, and in the pit of loathsome disease, dropsy-stricken and swollen of body into the semblance of a monstrous lute,

lies Adamo di Brescia, the coiner of false coin. He bids us listen to his misery; we stop, and with dry and gaping lips he tells us how he dreams day and night of the brooks of clear water that in cool, dewy channels gush down the green Casentine hills. Sinon, the false Greek of Troy, mocks at him. He smites him in the face, and they wrangle. We are fascinated by their shame, and loiter, till Virgil chides us and leads us away to that city turreted by giants, where great Nimrod blows his horn. Terrible things are in store for us, and we go to meet them in Dante's raiment and with Dante's heart. We traverse the marshes of the Styx, and Argenti swims to the boat through the slimy waves. He calls to us, and we reject him. When we hear the voice of his agony we are glad, and Virgil praises us for the bitterness of our scorn. We tread upon the cold crystal of Cocytus, in which traitors stick like straws in glass. Our foot strikes against the head of Bocca. He will not tell us his name, and we tear the hair in handfuls from the screaming skull. Alberigo prays us to break the ice upon his face that he may weep a little. We pledge our word to him, and when he has uttered his dolorous tale we deny the word that we have spoken, and pass from him; such

cruelty being courtesy indeed, for who more base than he who has mercy for the condemned of God? In the jaws of Lucifer we see the man who sold Christ, and in the jaws of Lucifer the man who slew Cæsar. We tremble, and come forth to re-behold the stars.

In the land of Purgation the air is freer, and the holy mountain rises into the pure light of day. There is peace for us, and for those who for a season abide in it there is some peace also, though, pale from the poison of the Maremma, Madonna Pia passes before us, and Ismene, with the sorrow of earth still lingering about her, is there. Soul after soul makes us share in some repentance or some joy. He whom the mourning of his widow taught to drink the sweet wormwood of pain, tells us of Nella praying in her lonely bed, and we learn from the mouth of Buonconte how a single tear may save a dying sinner from the fiend. Sordello, that noble and disdainful Lombard, eyes us from afar like a couchant lion. When he learns that Virgil is one of Mantua's citizens he falls upon his neck, and when he learns that he is the singer of Rome he falls before his feet. In that valley whose grass and flowers are fairer than cleft emerald and Indian wood, and

brighter than scarlet and silver, they are singing who in the world were kings; but the lips of Rudolph of Hapsburg do not move to the music of the others, and Philip of France beats his breast, and Henry of England sits alone. On and on we go, climbing the marvellous stair, and the stars become larger than their wont, and the song of the kings grows faint, and at length we reach the seven trees of gold and the garden of the Earthly Paradise. In a griffin-drawn chariot appears one whose brows are bound with olive, who is veiled in white, and mantled in green, and robed in a vesture that is coloured like live fire. The ancient flame wakes within us. Our blood quickens through terrible pulses. We recognise her. It is Beatrice, the woman we have worshipped. The ice congealed about our hearts melts. Wild tears of anguish break from us, and we bow our forehead to the ground, for we know that we have sinned. When we have done penance, and are purified, and have drunk of the fountain of Lethe, and bathed in the fountain of Eunoe, the mistress of our soul raises us to the Paradise of Heaven. Out of that eternal pearl, the moon, the face of Piccarda Donati leans to us. Her beauty troubles us for a moment, and when, like a thing that falls through water,

she passes away, we gaze after her with wistful eyes. The sweet planet of Venus is full of lovers. Cunizza, the sister of Ezzelin, the lady of Sordello's heart, is there, and Folco, the passionate singer of Provence, who in sorrow for Azalais forsook the world, and the Canaanitish harlot whose soul was the first that Christ redeemed. Joachim of Flora stands in the sun, and, in the sun, Aquinas recounts the story of St. Francis and Bonaventure the story of St. Dominic. Through the burning rubies of Mars, Cacciaguida approaches. He tells us of the arrow that is shot from the bow of exile, and how salt tastes the bread of another, and how steep are the stairs in the house of a stranger. In Saturn the souls sing not, and even she who guides us dare not smile. On a ladder of gold the flames rise and fall. At last, we see the pageant of the Mystical Rose. Beatrice fixes her eyes upon the face of God, to turn them not again. The beatific vision is granted to us; we know the Love that moves the sun and all the stars.

Yes, we can put the earth back six hundred courses and make ourselves one with the great Florentine, kneel at the same altar with him, and share his rapture and his scorn. And if we grow

tired of an antique time, and desire to realise our own age in all its weariness and sin, are there not books that can make us live more in one single hour than life can make us live in a score of shameful years? Close to your hand lies a little volume, bound in some Nile-green skin that has been powdered with gilded nenuphars and smoothed with hard ivory. It is the book that Gautier loved, it is Baudelaire's masterpiece. Open it at that sad madrigal that begins

> "Que m'importe que tu sois sage?
> Sois belle! et sois triste!"

and you will find yourself worshipping sorrow as you have never worshipped joy. Pass on to the poem on the man who tortures himself, let its subtle music steal into your brain and colour your thoughts, and you will become for a moment what he was who wrote it; nay, not for a moment only, but for many barren moonlit nights and sunless sterile days will a despair that is not your own make its dwelling within you, and the misery of another gnaw your heart away. Read the whole book, suffer it to tell even one of its secrets to your soul, and your soul will grow eager to know more, and will feed upon poisonous honey, and seek

to repent of strange crimes of which it is guiltless, and to make atonement for terrible pleasures that it has never known. And then, when you are tired of these flowers of evil, turn to the flowers that grow in the garden of Perdita, and in their dew-drenched chalices cool your fevered brow, and let their loveliness heal and restore your soul; or wake from his forgotten tomb the sweet Syrian, Meleager, and bid the lover of Heliodore make you music, for he, too, has flowers in his song, red pomegranate blossoms, and irises that smell of myrrh, ringed daffodils and dark blue hyacinths, and marjoram and crinkled ox-eyes. Dear to him was the perfume of the bean-field at evening, and dear to him the odorous eared-spikenard that grew on the Syrian hills, and the fresh, green thyme, the wine-cup's charm. The feet of his love, as she walked in the garden, were like lilies set upon lilies. Softer than sleep-laden poppy petals were her lips, softer than violets and as scented. The flame-like crocus sprang from the grass to look at her. For her the slim narcissus stored the cool rain; and for her the anemones forgot the Sicilian winds that wooed them. And neither crocus, nor anemone, nor narcissus was as fair as she was.

It is a strange thing, this transference of emotion. We sicken with the same maladies as the poets, and the singer lends us his pain. Dead lips have their message for us, and hearts that have fallen to dust can communicate their joy. We run to kiss the bleeding mouth of Fantine, and we follow Manon Lescaut over the whole world. Ours is the love-madness of the Tyrian, and the terror of Orestes is ours also. There is no passion that we cannot feel, no pleasure that we may not gratify, and we can choose the time of our initiation and the time of our freedom, also. Life! Life! Don't let us go to life for our fulfilment or our experience. It is a thing narrowed by circumstances, incoherent in its utterance, and without that fine correspondence of form and spirit which is the only thing that can satisfy the artistic and critical temperament. It makes us pay too high a price for its wares, and we purchase the meanest of its secrets at a cost that is monstrous and infinite.

Ernest. Must we go, then, to Art for everything?

Gilbert. For everything. Because Art does not hurt us. The tears that we shed at a play are a type of the exquisite sterile emotions that it is

the function of Art to awaken. We weep, but we are not wounded. We grieve, but our grief is not bitter. In the actual life of man, sorrow, as Spinoza says somewhere, is a passage to a lesser perfection. But the sorrow with which Art fills us both purifies and initiates, if I may quote once more from the great art critic of the Greeks. It is through Art, and through Art only, that we can realise our perfection; through Art, and through Art only, that we can shield ourselves from the sordid perils of actual existence. This results not merely from the fact that nothing that one can imagine is worth doing, and that one can imagine everything, but from the subtle law that emotional forces, like the forces of the physical sphere, are limited in extent and energy. One can feel so much, and no more. And how can it matter with what pleasure life tries to tempt one, or with what pain it seeks to maim and mar one's soul, if in the spectacle of the lives of those who have never existed one has found the true secret of joy, and wept away one's tears over their deaths who, like Cordelia and the daughter of Brabantio, can never die?

Ernest. Stop a moment. It seems to me that

in everything that you have said there is something radically immoral.

Gilbert. All art is immoral.

Ernest. All art?

Gilbert. Yes. For emotion for the sake of emotion is the aim of art, and emotion for the sake of action is the aim of life, and of that practical organisation of life that we call society. Society, which is the beginning and basis of morals, exists simply for the concentration of human energy, and in order to ensure its own continuance and healthy stability it demands, and no doubt rightly demands, of each of its citizens that he should contribute some form of productive labour to the common weal, and toil and travail that the day's work may be done. Society often forgives the criminal; it never forgives the dreamer. The beautiful sterile emotions that art excites in us are hateful in its eyes, and so completely are people dominated by the tyranny of this dreadful social ideal that they are always coming shamelessly up to one at Private Views and other places that are open to the general public, and saying in a loud, stentorian voice, "What are you doing?" whereas "What are you thinking?" is the only question that any single civilised being should ever be al-

lowed to whisper to another. They mean well, no doubt, these honest, beaming folk. Perhaps that is the reason why they are so excessively tedious. But some one should teach them that while, in the opinion of society, Contemplation is the gravest sin of which any citizen can be guilty, in the opinion of the highest culture it is the proper occupation of man.

Ernest. Contemplation?

Gilbert. Contemplation. I said to you some time ago that it was far more difficult to talk about a thing than to do it. Let me say to you now that to do nothing at all is the most difficult thing in the world, the most difficult and the most intellectual. To Plato, with his passion for wisdom, this was the noblest form of energy. To Aristotle, with his passion for knowledge, this was the noblest form of energy, also. It was to this that the passion for holiness led the saint and the mystic of mediæval days.

Ernest. We exist, then, to do nothing?

Gilbert. It is to do nothing that the elect exist. Action is limited and relative. Unlimited and absolute is the vision of him who sits at ease and watches, who walks in loneliness and dreams. But we who are born at the close of this wonderful

age, are at once too cultured and too critical, too intellectually subtle and too curious of exquisite pleasures, to accept any speculations about life in exchange for life itself. To us the *citta divina* is colourless, and the *fruitio Dei* without meaning. Metaphysics do not satisfy our temperaments, and religious ecstasy is out of date. The world through which the Academic philosopher becomes "the spectator of all time and of all existence" is not really an ideal world, but simply a world of abstract ideas. When we enter it, we starve amidst the chill mathematics of thought. The courts of the city of God are not open to us now. Its gates are guarded by Ignorance, and to pass them we have to surrender all that in our nature is most divine. It is enough that our fathers believed. They have exhausted the faith-faculty of the species. Their legacy to us is the scepticism of which they were afraid. Had they put it into words, it might not live within us as thought. No, Ernest, no. We cannot go back to the saint. There is far more to be learned from the sinner. We cannot go back to the philosopher, and the mystic leads us astray. Who, as Mr. Pater suggests somewhere, would exchange the curve of a single rose-leaf for that formless, intangible Being which

Plato rates so high? What to us is the Illumination of Philo, the Abyss of Eckhart, the Vision of Böhme, the monstrous Heaven itself that was revealed to Swedenborg's blinded eyes? Such things are less than the yellow trumpet of one daffodil of the field, far less than the meanest of the visible arts; for, just as Nature is matter struggling into mind, so Art is mind expressing itself under the conditions of matter, and thus, even in the lowliest of her manifestations, she speaks to both sense and soul alike. To the æsthetic temperament the vague is always repellent. The Greeks were a nation of artists, because they were spared the sense of the infinite. Like Aristotle, like Goethe after he had read Kant, we desire the concrete, and nothing but the concrete can satisfy us.

Ernest. What, then, do you propose?

Gilbert. It seems to me that with the development of the critical spirit we shall be able to realise, not merely our own lives, but the collective life of the race, and so to make ourselves absolutely modern, in the true meaning of the word modernity. For he to whom the present is the only thing that is present, knows nothing of the age in which he lives. To realise the nineteenth

century, one must realise every century that has preceded it and that has contributed to its making. To know anything about oneself, one must know all about others. There must be no mood with which one cannot sympathise, no dead mode of life that one cannot make alive. Is this impossible? I think not. By revealing to us the absolute mechanism of all action, and so freeing us from the self-imposed and trammelling burden of moral responsibility, the scientific principle of Heredity has become, as it were, the warrant for the contemplative life. It has shown us that we are never less free than when we try to act. It has hemmed us round with the nets of the hunter, and written upon the wall the prophecy of our doom. We may not watch it, for it is within us. We may not see it, save in a mirror that mirrors the soul. It is Nemesis without her mask. It is the last of the Fates, and the most terrible. It is the only one of the gods whose real name we know.

And yet, while in the sphere of practical and external life it has robbed energy of its freedom and activity of its choice, in the subjective sphere, where the soul is at work, it comes to us, this terrible shadow, with many gifts in its hands, gifts of strange temperaments and subtle susceptibili-

ties, gifts of wild ardours and chill moods of indifference, complex multiform gifts of thoughts that are at variance with each other, and passions that war against themselves. And so, it is not our own life that we live, but the lives of the dead, and the soul that dwells within us is no single spiritual entity, making us personal and individual, created for our service, and entering into us for our joy. It is something that has dwelt in fearful places, and in ancient sepulchres has made its abode. It is sick with many maladies, and has memories of curious sins. It is wiser than we are, and its wisdom is bitter. It fills us with impossible desires, and makes us follow what we know we cannot gain. One thing, however, Ernest, it can do for us. It can lead us away from surroundings whose beauty is dimmed to us by the mist of familiarity, or whose ignoble ugliness and sordid claims are marring the perfection of our development. It can help us to leave the age in which we were born, and to pass into other ages, and find ourselves not exiled from their air. It can teach us how to escape from our experience, and to realise the experiences of those who are greater than we are. The pain of Leopardi crying out against life becomes our pain. Theocritus

blows on his pipe, and we laugh with the lips of nymph and shepherd. In the wolfskin of Pierre Vidal we flee before the hounds, and in the armour of Lancelot we ride from the bower of the Queen. We have whispered the secret of our love beneath the cowl of Abelard, and in the stained raiment of Villon have put our shame into song. We can see the dawn through Shelley's eyes, and when we wander with Endymion the Moon grows amorous of our youth. Ours is the anguish of Atys, and ours the weak rage and noble sorrows of the Dane. Do you think that it is the imagination that enables us to live these countless lives? Yes: it is the imagination; and the imagination is the result of heredity. It is simply concentrated race-experience.

Ernest. But where in this is the function of the critical spirit?

Gilbert. The culture that this transmission of racial experiences makes possible can be made perfect by the critical spirit alone, and indeed may be said to be one with it. For who is the true critic but he who bears within himself the dreams, and ideas, and feelings of myriad generations, and to whom no form of thought is alien, no emotional impulse obscure? And who the true man of cul-

ture, if not he who by fine scholarship and fastidious rejection has made instinct self-conscious and intelligent, and can separate the work that has distinction from the work that has it not, and so by contact and comparison makes himself master of the secrets of style and school, and understands their meanings, and listens to their voices, and develops that spirit of disinterested curiosity which is the real root, as it is the real flower, of the intellectual life, and thus attains to intellectual clarity; and, having learned "the best that is known and thought in the world," lives—it is not fanciful to say so—with those who are the Immortals?

Yes, Ernest: the contemplative life, the life that has for its aim not *doing* but *being,* and not *being* merely, but *becoming*—that is what the critical spirit can give us. The gods live thus: either brooding over their own perfection, as Aristotle tells us, or, as Epicurus fancied, watching with the calm eyes of the spectator the tragi-comedy of the world that they have made. We, too, might live like them, and set ourselves to witness with appropriate emotions the varied scenes that man and nature afford. We might make ourselves spiritual by detaching ourselves from action, and become perfect by the rejection of energy. It has often

seemed to me that Browning felt something of this. Shakespeare hurls Hamlet into active life, and makes him realise his mission by effort. Browning might have given us a Hamlet who would have realised his mission by thought. Incident and event were to him unreal or unmeaning. He made the soul the protagonist of life's tragedy, and looked on action as the one undramatic element of a play. To us, at any rate, the *BIOΣ ΘΕΩΡΗΤΙΚΟΣ* is the true ideal. From the high tower of Thought we can look out at the world. Calm, and self-centred, and complete, the æsthetic critic contemplates life, and no arrow drawn at a venture can pierce between the joints of his harness. He at least is safe. He has discovered how to live.

Is such a mode of life immoral? Yes: all the arts are immoral, except those baser forms of sensual or didactic art that seek to excite to action of evil or of good. For action of every kind belongs to the sphere of ethics. The aim of art is simply to create a mood. Is such a mode of life unpractical? Ah! it is not so easy to be unpractical as the ignorant Philistine imagines. It were well for England if it were so. There is no country in the world so much in need of unpractical

people as this country of ours. With us, Thought is degraded by its constant association with practice. Who that moves in the stress and turmoil of actual existence, noisy politician, or brawling social reformer, or poor, narrow-minded priest, blinded by the sufferings of that unimportant section of the community among whom he has cast his lot, can seriously claim to be able to form a disinterested intellectual judgment about any one thing? Each of the professions means a prejudice. The necessity for a career forces every one to take sides. We live in the age of the overworked, and the under-educated; the age in which people are so industrious that they become absolutely stupid. And, harsh though it may sound, I cannot help saying that such people deserve their doom. The sure way of knowing nothing about life is to try to make oneself useful.

Ernest. A charming doctrine, Gilbert.

Gilbert. I am not sure about that, but it has at least the minor merit of being true. That the desire to do good to others produces a plentiful crop of prigs is the least of the evils of which it is the cause. The prig is a very interesting psychological study, and though of all poses a moral pose is the most offensive, still to have a pose at all

is something. It is a formal recognition of the importance of treating life from a definite and reasoned standpoint. That Humanitarian Sympathy wars against Nature, by securing the survival of the failure, may make the man of science loathe its facile virtues. The political economist may cry out against it for putting the improvident on the same level as the provident, and so robbing life of the strongest, because most sordid, incentive to industry. But, in the eyes of the thinker, the real harm that emotional sympathy does is that it limits knowledge, and so prevents us from solving any single social problem. We are trying at present to stave off the coming crisis, the coming revolution, as my friends the Fabianists call it, by means of doles and alms. Well, when the revolution or crisis arrives, we shall be powerless because we shall know nothing. And so, Ernest, let us not be deceived. England will never be civilised until she has added Utopia to her dominions. There is more than one of her colonies that she might with advantage surrender for so fair a land. What we want are unpractical people who see beyond the moment, and think beyond the day. Those who try to lead the people can only do so by following the mob. It is through the voice

of one crying in the wilderness that the ways of the gods must be prepared.

But perhaps you think that in beholding for the mere joy of beholding, and contemplating for the sake of contemplation, there is something that is egotistic. If you think so, do not say so. It takes a thoroughly selfish age, like our own, to deify self-sacrifice. It takes a thoroughly grasping age, such as that in which we live, to set above the fine intellectual virtues those shallow and emotional virtues that are an immediate practical benefit to itself. They miss their aim, too, these philanthropists and sentimentalists of our day, who are always chattering to one about one's duty to one's neighbour. For the development of the race depends on the development of the individual, and where self-culture has ceased to be the ideal the intellectual standard is instantly lowered, and, often, ultimately lost. If you meet at dinner a man who has spent his life in educating himself—a rare type in our time, I admit, but still one occasionally to be met with—you rise from table richer, and conscious that a high ideal has for a moment touched and sanctified your days. But oh! my dear Ernest, to sit next to a man who has spent his life in trying to educate others!

What a dreadful experience that is! How appalling is that ignorance which is the inevitable result of the fatal habit of imparting opinions! How limited in range the creature's mind proves to be! How it wearies us, and must weary himself, with its endless repetitions and sickly reiteration! How lacking it is in any element of intellectual growth! In what a vicious circle it always moves!

Ernest. You speak with strange feeling, Gilbert. Have you had this dreadful experience, as you call it, lately?

Gilbert. Few of us escape it. People say that the schoolmaster is abroad. I wish to goodness he were. But the type of which, after all, he is only one, and certainly the least important, of the representatives, seems to me to be really dominating our lives; and just as the philanthropist is the nuisance of the ethical sphere, so the nuisance of the intellectual sphere is the man who is so occupied in trying to educate others that he has never had any time to educate himself. No, Ernest, self-culture is the true ideal of man. Goethe saw it, and the immediate debt that we owe to Goethe is greater than the debt we owe to any man since Greek days. The Greeks saw it, and have left us, as their legacy to modern thought, the conception

of the contemplative life as well as the critical method by which alone can that life be truly realised. It was the one thing that made the Renaissance great, and gave us Humanism. It is the one thing that could make our own age great also; for the real weakness of England lies, not in incomplete armaments or unfortified coasts, not in the poverty that creeps through sunless lanes, or the drunkenness that brawls in loathsome courts, but simply in the fact that her ideals are emotional and not intellectual.

I do not deny that the intellectual ideal is difficult of attainment, still less that it is, and perhaps will be for years to come, unpopular with the crowd. It is so easy for people to have sympathy with suffering. It is so difficult for them to have sympathy with thought. Indeed, so little do ordinary people understand what thought really is, that they seem to imagine that, when they have said that a theory is dangerous, they have pronounced its condemnation, whereas it is only such theories that have any true intellectual value. An idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all.

Ernest. Gilbert, you bewilder me. You have told me that all art is, in its essence, immoral.

Are you going to tell me now that all thought is, in its essence, dangerous?

Gilbert. Yes, in the practical sphere it is so. The security of society lies in custom and unconscious instinct, and the basis of the stability of society, as a healthy organism, is the complete absence of any intelligence amongst its members. The great majority of people being fully aware of this, rank themselves naturally on the side of that splendid system that elevates them to the dignity of machines, and rage so wildly against the intrusion of the intellectual faculty into any question that concerns life, that one is tempted to define man as a rational animal who always loses his temper when he is called upon to act in accordance with the dictates of reason. But let us turn from the practical sphere, and say no more about the wicked philanthropists, who, indeed, may well be left to the mercy of the almond-eyed sage of the Yellow River, Chuang Tsŭ the wise, who has proved that such well-meaning and offensive busybodies have destroyed the simple and spontaneous virtue that there is in man. They are a wearisome topic, and I am anxious to get back to the sphere in which criticism is free.

Ernest. The sphere of the intellect?

Gilbert. Yes. You remember that I spoke of the critic as being in his own way as creative as the artist, whose work, indeed, may be merely of value in so far as it gives to the critic a suggestion for some new mood of thought and feeling which he can realise with equal or perhaps greater distinction of form, and, through the use of a fresh medium of expression, make differently beautiful and more perfect. Well, you seemed to me to be a little sceptical about the theory. But perhaps I wronged you?

Ernest. I am not really sceptical about it, but I must admit that I feel very strongly that such work as you describe the critic producing—and creative such work must undoubtedly be admitted to be—is, of necessity, purely subjective, whereas the greatest work is objective always, objective and impersonal.

Gilbert. The difference between objective and subjective work is one of external form merely. It is accidental, not essential. All artistic creation is absolutely subjective. The very landscape that Corot looked at was, as he said himself, but a mood of his own mind; and those great figures of Greek or English drama that seem to us to possess an actual existence of their own, apart from

the poets who shaped and fashioned them, are, in their ultimate analysis, simply the poets themselves, not as they thought they were, but as they thought they were not; and by such thinking came in strange manner, though but for a moment, really so to be. For out of ourselves we can never pass, nor can there be in creation what in the creator was not. Nay, I would say that the more objective a creation appears to be, the more subjective it really is. Shakespeare might have met Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in the white streets of London, or seen the serving-men of rival houses bite their thumbs at each other in the open square; but Hamlet came out of his soul, and Romeo out of his passion. They were elements of his nature to which he gave visible form, impulses that stirred so strongly within him that he had, as it were, perforce, to suffer them to realise their energy, not on the lower plane of actual life, where they would have been trammelled and constrained and so made imperfect, but on that imaginative plane of art where Love can indeed find in Death its rich fulfilment, where one can stab the eavesdropper behind the arras, and wrestle in a new-made grave, and make a guilty king drink his own hurt, and see one's father's spirit, beneath the glimpses

of the moon, stalking in complete steel from misty wall to wall. Action, being limited, would have left Shakespeare unsatisfied and unexpressed; and, just as it is because he did nothing that he has been able to achieve everything, so it is because he never speaks to us of himself in his plays that his plays reveal him to us absolutely, and show us his true nature and temperament far more completely than do those strange and exquisite sonnets, even, in which he bares to crystal eyes the secret closet of his heart. Yes, the objective form is the most subjective in matter. Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth.

Ernest. The critic, then, being limited to the subjective form, will necessarily be less able to fully express himself than the artist, who has always at his disposal the forms that are impersonal and objective.

Gilbert. Not necessarily, and certainly not at all if he recognises that each mode of criticism is, in its highest development, simply a mood, and that we are never more true to ourselves than when we are inconsistent. The æsthetic critic, constant only to the principle of beauty in all things, will ever be looking for fresh impressions, winning

from the various schools the secret of their charm, bowing, it may be, before foreign altars, or smiling, if it be his fancy, at strange, new gods. What other people call one's past has, no doubt, everything to do with them, but has absolutely nothing to do with oneself. The man who regards his past is a man who deserves to have no future to look forward to. When one has found expression for a mood, one has done with it. You laugh; but, believe me, it is so. Yesterday it was Realism that charmed one. One gained from it that *nouveau frisson* which it was its aim to produce. One analysed it, explained it, and wearied of it. At sunset came the *Luministe* in painting, and the *Symboliste* in poetry, and the spirit of mediævalism, that spirit which belongs not to time but to temperament, woke suddenly in wounded Russia, and stirred us for a moment by the terrible fascination of pain. To-day the cry is for Romance, and already the leaves are tremulous in the valley, and on the purple hill-tops walks Beauty with slim, gilded feet. The old modes of creation linger, of course. The artists reproduce either themselves or each other, with wearisome iteration. But Criticism is always moving on, and the critic is always developing.

Nor, again, is the critic really limited to the subjective form of expression. The method of the drama is his, as well as the method of the epos. He may use dialogue, as he did who set Milton talking to Marvel on the nature of comedy and tragedy, and made Sidney and Lord Brooke discourse on letters beneath the Penshurst oaks; or adopt narration, as Mr. Pater is fond of doing, each of whose Imaginary Portraits—is not that the title of the book?—presents to us, under the fanciful guise of fiction, some fine and exquisite piece of criticism, one on the painter Watteau, another on the philosophy of Spinoza, a third on the Pagan elements of the early Renaissance, and the last, and in some respects the most suggestive, on the source of that Aufklärung, that enlightening which dawned on Germany in the last century, and to which our own culture owes so great a debt. Dialogue, certainly, that wonderful literary form which, from Plato to Lucian, and from Lucian to Giordano Bruno, and from Bruno to that grand old Pagan in whom Carlyle took such delight, the creative critics of the world have always employed, can never lose for the thinker its attraction as a mode of expression. By its means he can both reveal and conceal himself, and give form to every

fancy, and reality to every mood. By its means he can exhibit the object from each point of view, and show it to us in the round, as a sculptor shows us things, gaining in this manner all the richness and reality of effect that comes from those side issues that are suddenly suggested by the central idea in its progress, and really illumine the idea more completely, or from those felicitous afterthoughts that give a fuller completeness to the central scheme, and yet convey something of the delicate charm of chance.

Ernest. By its means, too, he can invent an imaginary antagonist, and convert him when he chooses by some absurdly sophistical argument.

Gilbert. Ah! it is so easy to convert others. It is so difficult to convert oneself. To arrive at what one really believes, one must speak through lips different from one's own. To know the truth one must imagine myriads of falsehoods. For what is Truth? In matters of religion it is simply the opinion that has survived. In matters of science it is the ultimate sensation. In matters of art it is one's last mood. And you see now, Ernest, that the critic has at his disposal as many objective forms of expression as the artist has. Ruskin put his criticism into imaginative prose, and is

superb in his changes and contradictions; and Browning put his into blank verse, and made painter and poet yield us their secret; and M. Renan uses dialogue, and Mr. Pater fiction, and Rossetti translated into sonnet-music the colour of Giorgione and the design of Ingres, and his own design and colour also, feeling, with the instinct of one who had many modes of utterance, that the ultimate art is literature, and the finest and fullest medium that of words.

Ernest. Well, now that you have settled that the critic has at his disposal all objective forms, I wish you would tell me what are the qualities that should characterise the true critic.

Gilbert. What would you say they were?

Ernest. Well, I should say that a critic should, above all things, be fair.

Gilbert. Ah! not fair. A critic cannot be fair in the ordinary sense of the word. It is only about things that do not interest one that one can give a really unbiassed opinion, which is, no doubt, the reason why an unbiassed opinion is always absolutely valueless. The man who sees both sides of a question is a man who sees absolutely nothing at all. Art is a passion, and, in matters of art, Thought is inevitably coloured by

emotion, and so is fluid rather than fixed, and, depending upon fine moods and exquisite moments, cannot be narrowed into the rigidity of a scientific formula or a theological dogma. It is to the soul that Art speaks, and the soul may be made the prisoner of the mind as well as of the body. One should, of course, have no prejudices; but, as a great Frenchman remarked a hundred years ago, it is one's business in such matters to have preferences, and when one has preferences one ceases to be fair. It is only an auctioneer who can equally and impartially admire all schools of Art. No: fairness is not one of the qualities of the true critic. It is not even a condition of criticism. Each form of Art with which we come in contact dominates us for the moment to the exclusion of every other form. We must surrender ourselves absolutely to the work in question, whatever it may be, if we wish to gain its secret. For the time, we must think of nothing else, can think of nothing else, indeed.

Ernest. The true critic will be rational, at any rate, will he not?

Gilbert. Rational? There are two ways of disliking art, Ernest. One is to dislike it. The other, to like it rationally. For Art, as Plato saw, and

not without regret, creates in listener and spectator a form of divine madness. It does not spring from inspiration, but it makes others inspired. Reason is not the faculty to which it appeals. If one loves Art at all, one must love it beyond all other things in the world, and against such love, the reason, if one listened to it, would cry out. There is nothing sane about the worship of beauty. It is too splendid to be sane. Those of whose lives it forms the dominant note will always seem to the world to be pure visionaries.

Ernest. Well, at least the critic will be sincere.

Gilbert. A little sincerity is a dangerous thing, and a great deal of it is absolutely fatal. The true critic will, indeed, always be sincere in his devotion to the principle of beauty, but he will seek for beauty in every age and in each school, and will never suffer himself to be limited to any settled custom of thought, or stereotyped mode of looking at things. He will realise himself in many forms, and by a thousand different ways, and will ever be curious of new sensations and fresh points of view. Through constant change, and through constant change alone, he will find his true unity. He will not consent to be the slave of his own opinions. For what is mind but motion in the intellectual

sphere? The essence of thought, as the essence of life, is growth. You must not be frightened by words, Ernest. What people call insincerity is simply a method by which we can multiply our personalities.

Ernest. I am afraid I have not been fortunate in my suggestions.

Gilbert. Of the three qualifications you mentioned, two, sincerity and fairness, were, if not actually moral, at least on the border-land of morals, and the first condition of criticism is that the critic should be able to recognise that the sphere of Art and the sphere of Ethics are absolutely distinct and separate. When they are confused, Chaos has come again. They are too often confused in England now, and though our modern Puritans cannot destroy a beautiful thing, yet, by means of their extraordinary prurience they can almost taint beauty for a moment. It is chiefly, I regret to say, through journalism that such people find expression. I regret it because there is much to be said in favour of modern journalism. By giving us the opinions of the uneducated, it keeps us in touch with the ignorance of the community. By carefully chronicling the current events of contemporary life, it shows us of what

very little importance such events really are. By invariably discussing the unnecessary, it makes us understand what things are requisite for culture, and what are not. But it should not allow poor Tartuffe to write articles upon modern art. When it does this it stultifies itself. And yet Tartuffe's articles, and Chadband's notes, do this good, at least: They serve to show how extremely limited is the area over which ethics, and ethical considerations, can claim to exercise influence. Science is out of the reach of morals, for her eyes are fixed upon eternal truths. Art is out of the reach of morals, for her eyes are fixed upon things beautiful and immortal and ever-changing. To morals belong the lower and less intellectual spheres. However, let these mouthing Puritans pass; they have their comic side. Who can help laughing when an ordinary journalist seriously proposes to limit the subject-matter at the disposal of the artist? Some limitation might well, and will soon, I hope, be placed upon some of our newspapers and newspaper writers. For they give us the bald, sordid, disgusting facts of life. They chronicle, with degrading avidity, the sins of the second-rate, and with the conscientiousness of the illiterate give us accurate and prosaic details of the doings of

people of absolutely no interest whatsoever. But the artist, who accepts the facts of life, and yet transforms them into shapes of beauty, and makes them vehicles of pity or of awe, and shows their colour element, and their wonder, and their true ethical import also, and builds out of them a world more real than reality itself, and of loftier and more noble import—who shall set limits to him? Not the apostles of that new Journalism which is but the old vulgarity "writ large." Not the apostles of that new Puritanism, which is but the whine of the hypocrite, and is both writ and spoken badly. The mere suggestion is ridiculous. Let us leave these wicked people, and proceed to the discussion of the artistic qualifications necessary for the true critic.

Ernest. And what are they? Tell me yourself.

Gilbert. Temperament is the primary requisite for the critic—a temperament exquisitely susceptible to beauty, and to the various impressions that beauty gives us. Under what conditions, and by what means, this temperament is engendered in race or individual, we will not discuss at present. It is sufficient to note that it exists, and that there is in us a beauty sense, separate from the other senses and above them; separate from the reason,

and of nobler import; separate from the soul, and of equal value—a sense that leads some to create, and others, the finer spirits, as I think, to contemplate merely. But to be purified and made perfect, this sense requires some form of exquisite environment. Without this it starves, or is dulled. You remember that lovely passage in which Plato describes how a young Greek should be educated, and with what insistence he dwells upon the importance of surroundings, telling us how the lad is to be brought up in the midst of fair sights and sounds, so that the beauty of material things may prepare his soul for the reception of the beauty that is spiritual. Insensibly, and without knowing the reason why, he is to develop that real love of beauty which, as Plato is never weary of reminding us, is the true aim of education. By slow degrees there is to be engendered in him such a temperament as will lead him naturally and simply to choose the good in preference to the bad, and, rejecting what is vulgar and discordant, to follow by fine instinctive taste all that possesses grace and charm and loveliness. Ultimately, in its due course, this taste is to become critical and self-conscious, but at first it is to exist purely as a cultivated instinct, and "he who has received this

true culture of the inner man will, with clear and certain vision, perceive the omissions and faults in art or nature, and with a taste that cannot err, while he praises, and finds his pleasure in what is good, and receives it into his soul, and so becomes good and noble, he will rightly blame and hate the bad, now in the days of his youth, even before he is able to know the reason why": and so, when, later on, the critical and self-conscious spirit develops in him, he "will recognise and salute it as a friend with whom his education has made him long familiar." I need hardly say, Ernest, how far we in England have fallen short of this ideal, and I can imagine the smile that would illuminate the glossy face of the Philistine if one ventured to suggest to him that the true aim of education was the love of beauty, and that the methods by which education should work were the development of temperament, the cultivation of taste, and the creation of the critical spirit.

Yet, even for us, there is left some loveliness of environment, and the dulness of tutors and professors matters very little when one can loiter in the grey cloisters at Magdalen, and listen to some flute-like voice singing in Waynfleete's chapel, or lie in the green meadow, among the strange snake-

spotted fritillaries, and watch the sunburnt noon smite to a finer gold the tower's gilded vanes, or wander up the Christ Church staircase beneath the vaulted ceiling's shadowy fans, or pass through the sculptured gateway of Laud's building in the College of St. John. Nor is it merely at Oxford, or Cambridge, that the sense of beauty can be formed and trained and perfected. All over England there is a Renaissance of the decorative Arts. Ugliness has had its day. Even in the houses of the rich there is taste, and the houses of those who are not rich have been made gracious and comely and sweet to live in. Caliban, poor, noisy Caliban, thinks that when he has ceased to make mows at a thing, the thing ceases to exist. But if he mocks no longer, it is because he has been met with mockery, swifter and keener than his own, and for a moment has been bitterly schooled into that silence which should seal for ever his uncouth, distorted lips. What has been done up to now, has been chiefly in the clearing of the way. It is always more difficult to destroy than it is to create, and when what one has to destroy is vulgarity and stupidity, the task of destruction needs not merely courage but also contempt. Yet it seems to me to have been, in a measure, done.

We have got rid of what was bad. We have now to make what is beautiful. And though the mission of the æsthetic movement is to lure people to contemplate, not to lead them to create, yet as the creative instinct is strong in the Celt, and it is the Celt who leads in art, there is no reason why in future years this strange Renaissance should not become almost as mighty in its way as was that new birth of Art that woke many centuries ago in the cities of Italy.

Certainly, for the cultivation of temperament, we must turn to the decorative arts: to the arts that touch us, not to the arts that teach us. Modern pictures are, no doubt, delightful to look at. At least, some of them are. But they are quite impossible to live with; they are too clever, too assertive, too intellectual. Their meaning is too obvious, and their method too clearly defined. One exhausts what they have to say in a very short time, and then they become as tedious as one's relations. I am very fond of the work of many of the Impressionist painters of Paris and London. Subtlety and distinction have not yet left the school. Some of their arrangements and harmonies serve to remind one of the unapproachable beauty of Gautier's immortal *Symphonie en Blanc Ma-*

jeur, that flawless masterpiece of colour and music which may have suggested the type as well as the titles of many of their best pictures. For a class that welcomes the incompetent with sympathetic eagerness, and that confuses the bizarre with the beautiful, and vulgarity with truth, they are extremely accomplished. They can do etchings that have the brilliancy of epigrams, pastels that are as fascinating as paradoxes, and as for their portraits, whatever the commonplace may say against them, no one can deny that they possess that unique and wonderful charm which belongs to works of pure fiction. But even the Impressionists, earnest and industrious as they are, will not do. I like them. Their white keynote, with its variations in lilac, was an era in colour. Though the moment does not make the man, the moment certainly makes the Impressionist, and for the moment in art, and the "moment's monument," as Rossetti phrased it, what may not be said? They are suggestive, also. If they have not opened the eyes of the blind, they have at least given great encouragement to the short-sighted; and while their leaders may have all the inexperience of old age, their young men are far too wise to be ever sensible. Yet they will insist on treating painting

as if it were a mode of autobiography invented for the use of the illiterate, and are always prating to us on their coarse, gritty canvases of their unnecessary selves and their unnecessary opinions, and spoiling by a vulgar over-emphasis that fine contempt of nature which is the best and only modest thing about them. One tires, at the end, of the work of individuals whose individuality is always noisy, and generally uninteresting. There is far more to be said in favour of that newer school at Paris, the *Archaicistes,* as they call themselves, who, refusing to leave the artist entirely at the mercy of the weather, do not find the ideal of art in mere atmospheric effect, but seek rather for the imaginative beauty of design and the loveliness of fair colour, and rejecting the tedious realism of those who merely paint what they see, try to see something worth seeing, and to see it not merely with actual and physical vision, but with that nobler vision of the soul which is as far wider in spiritual scope as it is far more splendid in artistic purpose. They, at any rate, work under those decorative conditions that each art requires for its perfection, and have sufficient æsthetic instinct to regret those sordid and stupid limitations of absolute modernity of form which have proved

the ruin of so many of the Impressionists. Still, the art that is frankly decorative is the art to live with. It is, of all our visible arts, the one art that creates in us both mood and temperament. Mere colour, unspoiled by meaning, and unallied with definite form, can speak to the soul in a thousand different ways. The harmony that resides in the delicate proportions of lines and masses becomes mirrored in the mind. The repetitions of pattern give us rest. The marvels of design stir the imagination. In the mere loveliness of the materials employed there are latent elements of culture. Nor is this all. By its deliberate rejection of Nature as the ideal of beauty, as well as of the imitative method of the ordinary painter, decorative art not merely prepares the soul for the reception of true imaginative work, but develops in it that sense of form which is the basis of creative no less than of critical achievement. For the real artist is he who proceeds, not from feeling to form, but from form to thought and passion. He does not first conceive an idea, and then say to himself, "I will put my idea into a complex metre of fourteen lines," but, realising the beauty of the sonnet-scheme, he conceives certain modes of music and methods of rhyme, and

the mere form suggests what is to fill it and make it intellectually and emotionally complete. From time to time the world cries out against some charming artistic poet, because, to use its hackneyed and silly phrase, he has "nothing to say." But if he had something to say he would probably say it, and the result would be tedious. It is just because he has no new message that he can do beautiful work. He gains his inspiration from form, and from form purely, as an artist should. A real passion would ruin him. Whatever actually occurs is spoiled for art. All bad poetry springs from genuine feeling. To be natural is to be obvious, and to be obvious is to be inartistic.

Ernest. I wonder do you really believe what you say.

Gilbert. Why should you wonder? It is not merely in art that the body is the soul. In every sphere of life Form is the beginning of things. The rhythmic, harmonious gestures of dancing convey, Plato tells us, both rhythm and harmony into the mind. Forms are the food of faith, cried Newman in one of those great moments of sincerity that made us admire and know the man. He was right, though he may not have known how

terribly right he was. The Creeds are believed, not because they are rational, but because they are repeated. Yes: Form is everything. It is the secret of life. Find expression for a sorrow, and it will become dear to you. Find expression for a joy, and you intensify its ecstasy. Do you wish to love? Use Love's Litany, and the words will create the yearning from which the world fancies that they spring. Have you a grief that corrodes your heart? Steep yourself in the language of grief, learn its utterance from Prince Hamlet and Queen Constance, and you will find that mere expression is a mode of consolation, and that Form, which is the birth of passion, is also the death of pain. And so, to return to the sphere of Art, it is Form that creates not merely the critical temperament, but also the æsthetic instinct, that unerring instinct that reveals to one all things under their conditions of beauty. Start with the worship of form, and there is no secret in art that will not be revealed to you, and remember that in criticism, as in creation, temperament is everything, and that it is, not by the time of their production, but by the temperaments to which they appeal, that the schools of art should be historically grouped.

Ernest. Your theory of education is delightful. But what influence will your critic, brought up in these exquisite surroundings, possess? Do you really think that any artist is ever affected by criticism?

Gilbert. The influence of the critic will be the mere fact of his own existence. He will represent the flawless type. In him the culture of the century will see itself realised. You must not ask of him to have any aim other than the perfecting of himself. The demand of the intellect, as has been well said, is simply to feel itself alive. The critic may, indeed, desire to exercise influence; but, if so, he will concern himself not with the individual, but with the age, which he will seek to wake into consciousness, and to make responsive, creating in it new desires and appetites, and lending it his larger vision and his nobler moods. The actual art of to-day will occupy him less than the art of to-morrow, far less than the art of yesterday, and as for this or that person at present toiling away, what do the industrious matter? They do their best, no doubt, and consequently we get the worst from them. It is always with the best intentions that the worst work is done. And besides, my dear Ernest, when a

man reaches the age of forty, or becomes a Royal Academician, or is elected a member of the Athenæum Club, or is recognised as a popular novelist, whose books are in great demand at suburban railway stations, one may have the amusement of exposing him, but one cannot have the pleasure of reforming him. And this is, I dare say, very fortunate for him; for I have no doubt that reformation is a much more painful process than punishment, is indeed punishment in its most aggravated and moral form—a fact which accounts for our entire failure as a community to reclaim that interesting phenomenon who is called the confirmed criminal.

Ernest. But may it not be that the poet is the best judge of poetry, and the painter of painting? Each art must appeal primarily to the artist who works in it. His judgment will surely be the most valuable?

Gilbert. The appeal of all art is simply to the artistic temperament. Art does not address herself to the specialist. Her claim is that she is universal, and that in all her manifestations she is one. Indeed, so far from its being true that the artist is the best judge of art, a really great artist can never judge of other people's work at all, and

can hardly, in fact, judge of his own. That very concentration of vision that makes a man an artist limits by its sheer intensity his faculty of fine appreciation. The energy of creation hurries him blindly on to his own goal. The wheels of his chariot raise the dust as a cloud around him. The gods are hidden from each other. They can recognise their worshippers. That is all.

Ernest. You say that a great artist cannot recognise the beauty of work different from his own.

Gilbert. It is impossible for him to do so. Wordsworth saw in *Endymion* merely a pretty piece of Paganism, and Shelley, with his dislike of actuality, was deaf to Wordsworth's message, being repelled by its form; and Byron, that great, passionate, human, incomplete creature, could appreciate neither the poet of the cloud nor the poet of the lake, and the wonder of Keats was hidden from him. The realism of Euripides was hateful to Sophocles. Those droppings of warm tears had no music for him. Milton, with his sense of the grand style, could not understand the method of Shakespeare, any more than could Sir Joshua the method of Gainsborough. Bad artists always admire each other's work. They call it being large-minded and free from prejudice. But a truly

great artist cannot conceive of life being shown, or beauty fashioned, under any conditions other than those that he has selected. Creation employs all its critical faculty within its own sphere. It may not use it in the sphere that belongs to others. It is exactly because a man cannot do a thing that he is the proper judge of it.

Ernest. Do you really mean it?

Gilbert. Yes, for creation limits, while contemplation widens, the vision.

Ernest. But what about technique? Surely, each art has its separate technique?

Gilbert. Certainly: each art has its grammar and its materials. There is no mystery about either, and the incompetent can always be correct. But, while the laws upon which Art rests may be fixed and certain, to find their true realisation they must be touched by the imagination into such beauty that they will seem an exception, each one of them. Technique is really personality. That is the reason why the artist cannot teach it, why the pupil cannot learn it, and why the æsthetic critic can understand it. To the great poet there is only one method of music—his own. To the great painter there is only one manner of painting —that which he himself employs. The æsthetic

critic, and the æsthetic critic alone, can appreciate all forms and modes. It is to him that Art makes her appeal.

Ernest. Well, I think I have put all my questions to you. And now I must admit——

Gilbert. Ah! don't say that you agree with me. When people agree with me I always feel that I must be wrong.

Ernest. In that case I certainly won't tell you whether I agree with you or not. But I will put another question. You have explained to me that criticism is a creative art. What future has it?

Gilbert. It is to criticism that the future belongs. The subject-matter at the disposal of creation becomes every day more limited in extent and variety. Providence and Mr. Walter Besant have exhausted the obvious. If creation is to last at all, it can only do so on the condition of becoming far more critical than it is at present. The old roads and dusty highways have been traversed too often. Their charm has been worn away by plodding feet, and they have lost that element of novelty or surprise which is so essential for romance. He who would stir us now by fiction must either give us an entirely new background, or reveal to us the soul of man in its innermost work-

ings. The first is for the moment being done for us by Mr. Rudyard Kipling. As one turns over the pages of his *Plain Tales from the Hills*, one feels as if one were seated under a palm-tree, reading life by superb flashes of vulgarity. The bright colours of the bazaars dazzle one's eyes. The jaded, second-rate Anglo-Indians are in exquisite incongruity with their surroundings. The mere lack of style in the story teller gives an odd journalistic realism to what he tells us. From the point of view of literature Mr. Kipling is a genius who drops his aspirates. From the point of view of life, he is a reporter who knows vulgarity better than any one has ever known it. Dickens knew its clothes and its comedy. Mr. Kipling knows its essence and its seriousness. He is our first authority on the second-rate, and has seen marvellous things through keyholes, and his backgrounds are real works of art. As for the second condition, we have had Browning, and Meredith is with us. But there is still much to be done in the sphere of introspection. People sometimes say that fiction is getting too morbid. As far as psychology is concerned, it has never been morbid enough. We have merely touched the surface of the soul, that is all. In one single ivory cell of the brain there

are stored away things more marvellous and more terrible than even they have dreamed of who, like the author of *Le Rouge et le Noir,* have sought to track the soul into its most secret places, and to make life confess its dearest sins. Still, there is a limit even to the number of untried backgrounds, and it is possible that a further development of the habit of introspection may prove fatal to that creative faculty to which it seeks to supply fresh material. I myself am inclined to think that creation is doomed. It springs from too primitive, too natural an impulse. However this may be, it is certain that the subject-matter at the disposal of creation is always diminishing, while the subject-matter of criticism increases daily. There are always new attitudes for the mind, and new points of view. The duty of imposing form upon chaos does not grow less as the world advances. There was never a time when Criticism was more needed than it is now. It is only by its means that Humanity can become conscious of the point at which it has arrived.

Hours ago, Ernest, you asked me the use of Criticism. You might just as well have asked me the use of thought. It is Criticism, as Arnold points out, that creates the intellectual atmosphere

of the age. It is Criticism, as I hope to point out myself some day, that makes the mind a fine instrument. We, in our educational system, have burdened the memory with a load of unconnected facts, and laboriously striven to impart our laboriously acquired knowledge. We teach people how to remember, we never teach them how to grow. It has never occurred to us to try and develop in the mind a more subtle quality of apprehension and discernment. The Greeks did this, and when we come in contact with the Greek critical intellect we cannot but be conscious that, while our subject-matter is in every respect larger and more varied than theirs, theirs is the only method by which this subject-matter can be interpreted. England has done one thing; it has invented and established Public Opinion, which is an attempt to organise the ignorance of the community and to elevate it to the dignity of physical force. But Wisdom has always been hidden from it. Considered as an instrument of thought the English mind is coarse and undeveloped. The only thing that can purify it is the growth of the critical instinct.

It is Criticism, again, that, by concentration, makes culture possible. It takes the cumbersome mass of creative work, and distils it into a finer

essence. Who that desires to retain any sense of form could struggle through the monstrous multitudinous books that the world has produced, books in which thought stammers or ignorance brawls? The thread that is to guide us across the wearisome labyrinth is in the hands of Criticism. Nay, more, where there is no record, and history is either lost or was never written, Criticism can recreate the past for us from the very smallest fragment of language or art, just as surely as the man of science can, from some tiny bone, or the mere impress of a foot upon a rock, recreate for us the winged dragon or Titan lizard that once made the earth shake beneath its tread, can call Behemoth out of his cave, and make Leviathan swim once more across the startled sea. Prehistoric history belongs to the philological and archæological critic. It is to him that the origins of things are revealed. The self-conscious deposits of an age are nearly always misleading. Through philological criticism alone we know more of the centuries of which no actual record has been preserved, than we do of the centuries that have left us their scrolls. It can do for us what can be done neither by physics nor metaphysics. It can give us the exact science of mind in the process

of becoming. It can do for us what History cannot do. It can tell us what man thought before he learned how to write. You have asked me about the influence of Criticism. I think I have answered that question already; but there is this also to be said. It is Criticism that makes us cosmopolitan. The Manchester school tried to make men realise the brotherhood of humanity, by pointing out the commercial advantages of peace. It sought to degrade the wonderful world into a common market place for the buyer and the seller. It addressed itself to the lowest instincts, and it failed. War followed upon war, and the tradesman's creed did not prevent France and Germany from clashing together in blood-stained battle. There are others of our own day who seek to appeal to mere emotional sympathies, or to the shallow dogmas of some vague system of abstract ethics. They have their Peace Societies, so dear to the sentimentalists, and their proposals for unarmed International Arbitration, so popular among those who have never read history. But mere emotional sympathy will not do. It is too variable, and too closely connected with the passions; and a board of arbitrators who, for the general welfare of the race, are to be deprived of the power

of putting their decisions into execution, will not be of much avail. There is only one thing worse than Injustice, and that is Justice without her sword in her hand. When Right is not Might, it is Evil.

No: the emotions will not make us cosmopolitan, any more than the greed for gain could do so. It is only by the cultivation of the habit of intellectual criticism that we shall be able to rise superior to race prejudices. Goethe—you will not misunderstand what I say—was a German of the Germans. He loved his country—no man more so. Its people were dear to him; and he led them. Yet, when the iron hoof of Napoleon trampled upon vineyard and cornfield, his lips were silent. "How can one write songs of hatred without hating?" he said to Eckermann, "and how could I, to whom culture and barbarism are alone of importance, hate a nation which is among the most cultivated of the earth, and to which I owe so great a part of my own cultivation?" This note, sounded in the modern world by Goethe first, will become, I think, the starting point for the cosmopolitanism of the future. Criticism will annihilate race prejudices by insisting upon the unity of the human mind in the variety of its forms. If we

are tempted to make war upon another nation, we shall remember that we are seeking to destroy an element of our own culture, and possibly its most important element. As long as war is regarded as wicked it will always have its fascination. When it is looked upon as vulgar, it will cease to be popular. The change will, of course, be slow, and people will not be conscious of it. They will not say "We will not war against France because her prose is perfect," but because the prose of France is perfect they will not hate the land. Intellectual criticism will bind Europe together in bonds far closer than those that can be forged by shopman or sentimentalist. It will give us the peace that springs from understanding.

Nor is this all. It is Criticism that, recognising no position as final, and refusing to bind itself by the shallow shibboleths of any sect or school, creates that serene philosophic temper which loves truth for its own sake, and loves it not the less because it knows it to be unattainable. How little we have of this temper in England, and how much we need it! The English mind is always in a rage. The intellect of the race is wasted in the sordid and stupid quarrels of second-rate politicians or third-rate theologians. It was reserved

for a man of science to show us the supreme example of that "sweet reasonableness" of which Arnold spoke so wisely, and, alas! to so little effect. The author of the *Origin of Species* had, at any rate, the philosophic temper. If one contemplates the ordinary pulpits and platforms of England, one can but feel the contempt of Julian, or the indifference of Montaigne. We are dominated by the fanatic, whose worst vice is his sincerity. Anything approaching to the free play of the mind is practically unknown amongst us. People cry out against the sinner, yet it is not the sinful, but the stupid, who are our shame. There is no sin except stupidity.

Ernest. Ah! what an antinomian you are!

Gilbert. The artistic critic, like the mystic, is an antinomian always. To be good, according to the vulgar standard of goodness, is obviously quite easy. It merely requires a certain amount of sordid terror, a certain lack of imaginative thought, and a certain low passion for middle-class respectability. Æsthetics are higher than ethics. They belong to a more spiritual sphere. To discern the beauty of a thing is the finest point to which we can arrive. Even a colour sense is more important, in the development of the individual, than a sense

of right and wrong. Æsthetics, in fact, are to Ethics, in the sphere of conscious civilisation, what, in the sphere of the external world, sexual is to natural selection. Ethics, like natural selection, make existence possible. Æsthetics, like sexual selection, make life lovely and wonderful, fill it with new forms, and give it progress, and variety, and change. And when we reach the true culture that is our aim, we attain to that perfection of which the saints have dreamed, the perfection of those to whom sin is impossible, not because they make the renunciations of the ascetic but because they can do everything they wish without hurt to the soul, and can wish for nothing that can do the soul harm, the soul being an entity so divine that it is able to transform into elements of a richer experience, or a finer susceptibility, or a newer mode of thought, acts or passions that with the common would be commonplace, or with the uneducated ignoble, or with the shameful vile. Is this dangerous? Yes; it is dangerous—all ideas, as I told you, are so. But the night wearies, and the light flickers in the lamp. One more thing I cannot help saying to you. You have spoken against Criticism as being a sterile thing. The nineteenth century is a turning point in history

simply on account of the work of two men, Darwin and Renan, the one the critic of the Book of Nature, the other the critic of the books of God. Not to recognise this is to miss the meaning of one of the most important eras in the progress of the world. Creation is always behind the age. It is Criticism that leads us. The Critical Spirit and the World Spirit are one.

Ernest. And he who is in possession of this spirit, or whom this spirit possesses, will, I suppose, do nothing?

Gilbert. Like the Persephone of whom Landor tells us, the sweet, pensive Persephone around whose white feet the asphodel and amaranth are blooming, he will sit contented "in that deep, motionless quiet which mortals pity, and which the gods enjoy." He will look out upon the world and know its secret. By contact with divine things he will become divine. His will be the perfect life, and his only.

Ernest. You have told me many strange things to-night, Gilbert. You have told me that it is more difficult to talk about a thing than to do it, and that to do nothing at all is the most difficult thing in the world; you have told me that all Art is immoral, and all thought dangerous; that criti-

cism is more creative than creation, and that the highest criticism is that which reveals in the work of Art what the artist had not put there; that it is exactly because a man cannot do a thing that he is the proper judge of it; and that the true critic is unfair, insincere, and not rational. My friend, you are a dreamer.

Gilbert. Yes: I am a dreamer. For a dreamer is one who can only find his way by moonlight, and his punishment is that he sees the dawn before the rest of the world.

Ernest. His punishment?

Gilbert. And his reward. But see, it is dawn already. Draw back the curtains and open the windows wide. How cool the morning air is! Piccadilly lies at our feet like a long riband of silver. A faint purple mist hangs over the Park, and the shadows of the white houses are purple. It is too late to sleep. Let us go down to Covent Garden and look at the roses. Come! I am tired of thought.

PART IV

A WOMAN OF NO IMPORTANCE

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY.

LORD ILLINGWORTH
SIR JOHN PONTEFRACT
LORD ALFRED RUFFORD
MR. KELVIL, M.P.
THE VEN. ARCHDEACON DAUBENY, D.D.
GERALD ARBUTHNOT
FARQUHAR, Butler
FRANCIS, Footman

LADY HUNSTANTON
LADY CAROLINE PONTEFRACT
LADY STUTFIELD
MRS. ALLONBY
MISS HESTER WORSLEY
ALICE, Maid
MRS. ARBUTHNOT

THE SCENES OF THE PLAY.

ACT I *The Terrace at Hunstanton Chase.*

ACT II *The Drawing-room at Hunstanton Chase.*

ACT III *The Hall at Hunstanton Chase.*

ACT IV *Sitting-room in Mrs. Arbuthnot's House at Wrockley.*

Time

The Present.

Place

The Shires.

The action of the play takes place within twenty-four hours.

FIRST ACT

SCENE—*Lawn in front of the terrace at Hunstanton.*

[*Sir John and Lady Caroline Pontefract, Miss Worsley, on chairs under large yew tree.*]

LADY CAROLINE

I believe this is the first English country house you have stayed at, Miss Worsley?

HESTER

Yes, Lady Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE

You have no country houses, I am told, in America?

HESTER

We have not many.

LADY CAROLINE

Have you any country? What we should call country?

HESTER

[*Smiling.*] We have the largest country in the world, Lady Caroline. They used to tell us at school that some of our states are as big as France and England put together.

LADY CAROLINE

Ah! you must find it very draughty, I should fancy. [*To Sir John.*] John, you should have your muffler. What is the use of my always knitting mufflers for you if you won't wear them?

SIR JOHN

I am quite warm, I assure you.

LADY CAROLINE

I think not, John. Well, you couldn't come to a more charming place than this, Miss Worsley, though the house is excessively damp, quite unpardonably damp, and dear Lady Hunstanton is sometimes a little lax about the people she asks down here. [*To Sir John.*] Jane mixes too much. Lord Illingworth, of course, is a man of high distinction. It is a privilege to meet him. And that member of Parliament, Mr. Kettle——

SIR JOHN

Kelvil, my love, Kelvil.

LADY CAROLINE

He must be quite respectable. One has never heard his name before in the whole course of one's life, which speaks volumes for a man, now-a-days. But Mrs. Allonby is hardly a very suitable person.

HESTER

I dislike Mrs. Allonby. I dislike her more than I can say.

LADY CAROLINE

I am not sure, Miss Worsley, that foreigners like yourself should cultivate likes or dislikes about the people they are invited to meet. Mrs. Allonby is very well born. She is a niece of Lord Brancaster's. It is said, of course, that she ran away twice before she was married. But you know how unfair people often are. I myself don't believe she ran away more than once.

HESTER

Mr. Arbuthnot is very charming.

LADY CAROLINE

Ah, yes! the young man who has a post in a bank. Lady Hunstanton is most kind in asking him here, and Lord Illingworth seems to have taken quite a fancy to him. I am not sure, however, that Jane is right in taking him out of his position. In my young days, Miss Worsley, one never met anyone in society who worked for their living. It was not considered the thing.

HESTER

In America those are the people we respect most.

LADY CAROLINE

I have no doubt of it.

HESTER

Mr. Arbuthnot has a beautiful nature! He is so simple, so sincere. He has one of the most beautiful natures I have ever come across. It is a privilege to meet *him*.

LADY CAROLINE

It is not customary in England, Miss Worsley, for a young lady to speak with such enthusiasm of any person of the opposite sex. Eng-

lish women conceal their feelings till after they are married. They show them then.

HESTER

Do you, in England, allow no friendship to exist between a young man and a young girl?

[*Enter Lady Hunstanton followed by Footman with shawls and a cushion.*]

LADY CAROLINE

We think it very inadvisable. Jane, I was just saying what a pleasant party you have asked us to meet. You have a wonderful power of selection. It is quite a gift.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Dear Caroline, how kind of you! I think we all do fit in very nicely together. And I hope our charming American visitor will carry back pleasant recollections of our English country life. [*To Footman.*] The cushion there, Francis. And my shawl. The Shetland. Get the Shetland. [*Exit Footman for Shawl..*]

[*Enter Gerald Arbuthnot.*]

GERALD

Lady Hunstanton, I have such good news to

tell you. Lord Illingworth has just offered to make me his secretary.

LADY HUNSTANTON

His secretary? That is good news indeed, Gerald. It means a very brilliant future in store for you. Your dear mother will be delighted. I really must try and induce her to come up here to-night. Do you think she would, Gerald? I know how difficult it is to get her to go anywhere.

GERALD

Oh! I am sure she would, Lady Hunstanton, if she knew Lord Illingworth had made me such an offer.

[*Enter Footman with shawl.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON

I will write and tell her about it, and ask her to come up and meet him. [*To Footman.*] Just wait, Francis. [*Writes letter.*]

LADY CAROLINE

That is a very wonderful opening for so young a man as you are, Mr. Arbuthnot.

GERALD

It is indeed, Lady Caroline. I trust I shall be able to show myself worthy of it.

LADY CAROLINE

I trust so.

GERALD

[*To Hester.*] *You* have not congratulated me yet, Miss Worsley.

HESTER

Are you very pleased about it?

GERALD

Of course I am. It means everything to me—things that were out of the reach of hope before may be within hope's reach now.

HESTER

Nothing should be out of the reach of hope. Life is a hope.

LADY HUNSTANTON

I fancy, Caroline, that Diplomacy is what Lord Illingworth is aiming at. I heard that he was offered Vienna. But that may not be true.

LADY CAROLINE

I don't think that England should be represented abroad by an unmarried man, Jane. It might lead to complications.

LADY HUNSTANTON

You are too nervous, Caroline. Believe me, you are too nervous. Besides, Lord Illingworth may marry any day. I was in hopes he would have married Lady Kelso. But I believe he said her family was too large. Or was it her feet? I forget which. I regret it very much. She was made to be an ambassador's wife.

LADY CAROLINE

She certainly has a wonderful faculty of remembering people's names, and forgetting their faces.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Well, that is very natural, Caroline, is it not? [*To Footman.*] Tell Henry to wait for an answer. I have written a line to your dear mother, Gerald, to tell her your good news, and to say she really must come to dinner.

[*Exit Footman.*]

GERALD

That is awfully kind of you, Lady Hunstanton. [*To Hester.*] Will you come for a stroll, Miss Worsley?

HESTER

With pleasure. [*Exit with Gerald.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON

I am very much gratified at Gerald Arbuthnot's good fortune. He is quite a *protégé* of mine. And I am particularly pleased that Lord Illingworth should have made the offer of his own accord without my suggesting anything. Nobody likes to be asked favours. I remember poor Charlotte Pagden making herself quite unpopular one season, because she had a French governess she wanted to recommend to every one.

LADY CAROLINE

I saw the governess, Jane. Lady Pagden sent her to me. It was before Eleanor came out. She was far too good-looking to be in any respectable household. I don't wonder Lady Pagden was so anxious to get rid of her.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Ah, that explains it.

LADY CAROLINE

John, the grass is too damp for you. You had better go and put on your overshoes at once.

SIR JOHN

I am quite comfortable, Caroline, I assure you.

LADY CAROLINE

You must allow me to be the best judge of that, John. Pray, do as I tell you.

[*Sir John gets up and goes off.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON

You spoil him, Caroline, you do, indeed.

[*Enter Mrs. Allonby and Lady Stutfield.*]

[*To Mrs. Allonby.*] Well, dear, I hope you like the park. It is said to be well timbered.

MRS. ALLONBY

The trees are wonderful, Lady Hunstanton.

LADY STUTFIELD

Quite, quite wonderful.

MRS. ALLONBY

But somehow, I feel sure that if I lived in the country for six months, I should become so unsophisticated that no one would take the slightest notice of me.

LADY HUNSTANTON

I assure you, dear, that the country has not that effect at all. Why, it was from Melthorpe, which is only two miles from here, that Lady Belton eloped with Lord Fethersdale. I remember the occurrence perfectly. Poor Lord Belton died three days afterwards of joy or gout. I forget which. We had a large party staying here at the time, so we were all very much interested in the whole affair.

MRS. ALLONBY

I think to elope is cowardly. It's running away from danger. And danger has become so rare in modern life.

LADY CAROLINE

As far as I can make out, the young women of the present day seem to make it the sole object of their lives to be always playing with fire.

MRS. ALLONBY

The one advantage of playing with fire, Lady Caroline, is that one never gets even singed. It is the people who don't know how to play with it who get burned up.

LADY STUTFIELD

Yes; I see that. It is very, very helpful.

LADY HUNSTANTON

I don't know how the world would get on with such a theory as that, dear Mrs. Allonby.

LADY STUTFIELD

Ah! The world was made for men and not for women.

MRS. ALLONBY

Oh, don't say that, Lady Stutfield. We have a much better time than they have. There are far more things forbidden to us than are forbidden to them.

LADY STUTFIELD

Yes; that is quite, quite true. I had not thought of that.

[*Enter Sir John and Mr. Kelvil.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON

Well, Mr. Kelvil, have you got through your work?

KELVIL

I have finished my writing for the day, Lady Hunstanton. It has been an arduous task. The demands on the time of a public man are very heavy now-a-days, very heavy indeed. And I don't think they meet with adequate recognition.

LADY CAROLINE

John, have you got your overshoes on?

SIR JOHN

Yes, my love.

LADY CAROLINE

I think you had better come over here, John. It is more sheltered.

SIR JOHN

I am quite comfortable, Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE

I think not, John. You had better sit beside me. [*Sir John rises and goes across.*]

LADY STUTFIELD

And what have you been writing about this morning, Mr. Kelvil?

KELVIL

On the usual subject, Lady Stutfield. On Purity.

LADY STUTFIELD

That must be such a very, very interesting thing to write about.

KELVIL

It is the one subject of really national importance, now-a-days, Lady Stutfield. I purpose addressing my constituents on the question before Parliament meets. I find that the poorer classes of this country display a marked desire for a higher ethical standard.

LADY STUTFIELD

How quite, quite nice of them.

LADY CAROLINE

Are you in favour of women taking part in politics, Mr. Kettle?

SIR JOHN

Kelvil, my love, Kelvil.

KELVIL

The growing influence of women is the one reassuring thing in our political life, Lady Caroline. Women are always on the side of morality, public and private.

LADY STUTFIELD

It is so very, very gratifying to hear you say that.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Ah, yes! the moral qualities in women—that is the important thing. I am afraid, Caroline, that dear Lord Illingworth doesn't value the moral qualities in women as much as he should.

[*Enter Lord Illingworth.*]

LADY STUTFIELD

The world says that Lord Illingworth is very, very wicked.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

But what world says that, Lady Stutfield? It must be the next world. This world and I

are on excellent terms. [*Sits down beside Mrs. Allonby.*]

LADY STUTFIELD

Every one *I* know says you are very, very wicked.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

It is perfectly monstrous the way people go about, now-a-days, saying things against one behind one's back that are absolutely and entirely true.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Dear Lord Illingworth is quite hopeless, Lady Stutfield. I have given up trying to reform him. It would take a Public Company with a Board of Directors and a paid Secretary to do that. But you have the secretary already, Lord Illingworth, haven't you? Gerald Arbuthnot has told us of his good fortune; it is really most kind of you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Oh, don't say that, Lady Hunstanton. Kind is a dreadful word. I took a great fancy to young Arbuthnot the moment I met him, and

he'll be of considerable use to me in something I am foolish enough to think of doing.

LADY HUNSTANTON

He is an admirable young man. And his mother is one of my dearest friends. He has just gone for a walk with our pretty American. She is very pretty, is she not?

LADY CAROLINE

Far too pretty. These American girls carry off all the good matches. Why can't they stay in their own country? They are always telling us it is the Paradise of women.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

It is, Lady Caroline. That is why, like Eve, they are so extremely anxious to get out of it.

LADY CAROLINE

Who are Miss Worsley's parents?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

American women are wonderfully clever in concealing their parents.

LADY HUNSTANTON

My dear Lord Illingworth, what do you mean? Miss Worsley, Caroline, is an orphan.

Her father was a very wealthy millionaire, or philanthropist, or both, I believe, who entertained my son quite hospitably, when he visited Boston. I don't know how he made his money, originally.

KELVIL

I fancy in American dry goods.

LADY HUNSTANTON

What are American dry goods?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

American novels.

LADY HUNSTANTON

How very singular! . . . Well, from whatever source her large fortune came, I have a great esteem for Miss Worsley. She dresses exceedingly well. All Americans do dress well. They get their clothes in Paris.

MRS. ALLONBY

They say, Lady Hunstanton, that when good Americans die they go to Paris.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Indeed? And when bad Americans die where do they go to?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Oh, they go to America.

KELVIL

I am afraid you don't appreciate America, Lord Illingworth. It is a very remarkable country, especially considering its youth.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

The youth of America is their oldest tradition. It has been going on now for three hundred years. To hear them talk one would imagine they were in their first childhood. As far as civilisation goes they are in their second.

KELVIL

There is undoubtedly a great deal of corruption in American politics. I suppose you allude to that?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I wonder.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Politics are in a very sad way everywhere, I am told. They certainly are in England. Dear Mr. Cardew is ruining the country. I wonder Mrs. Cardew allows him. I am sure, Lord Illing-

worth, you don't think that uneducated people should be allowed to have votes?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I think they are the only people who should.

KELVIL

Do you take no side then in modern politics, Lord Illingworth?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

One should never take sides in anything, Mr. Kelvil. Taking sides is the beginning of sincerity, and earnestness follows shortly afterwards, and the human being becomes a bore. However, the House of Commons really does very little harm. You can't make people good by Act of Parliament,—that is something.

KELVIL

You cannot deny that the House of Commons has always shown great sympathy with the sufferings of the poor.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

That is its special vice. That is the special vice of the age. One should sympathise with

the joy, the beauty, the colour of life. The less said about life's sores the better, Mr. Kelvil.

KELVIL

Still our East End is a very important problem.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Quite so. It is the problem of slavery. And we are trying to solve it by amusing the slaves.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Certainly, a great deal may be done by means of cheap entertainments, as you say, Lord Illingworth. Dear Dr. Daubeny, our rector here, provides with the assistance of his curates, really admirable recreations for the poor during the winter. And much good may be done by means of a magic lantern, or a missionary, or some popular amusement of that kind.

LADY CAROLINE

I am not at all in favour of amusements for the poor, Jane. Blankets and coals are sufficient. There is too much love of pleasure amongst the upper classes as it is. Health is what we want in modern life. The tone is not healthy, not healthy at all.

KELVIL

You are quite right, Lady Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE

I believe I am usually right.

MRS. ALLONBY

Horrid word "health."

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Silliest word in our language, and one knows so well the popular idea of health. The English country gentleman galloping after a fox—the unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable.

KELVIL

May I ask, Lord Illingworth, if you regard the House of Lords as a better institution than the House of Commons?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

A much better institution, of course. We in the House of Lords are never in touch with public opinion. That makes us a civilised body.

KELVIL

Are you serious in putting forward such a view?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Quite serious, Mr. Kelvil. [*To Mrs. Allonby.*] Vulgar habit that is people have now-a-days of asking one, after one has given them an idea, whether one is serious or not. Nothing is serious except passion. The intellect is not a serious thing, and never has been. It is an instrument on which one plays, that is all. The only serious form of intellect I know is the British intellect. And on the British intellect the illiterates play the drum.

LADY HUNSTANTON

What are you saying, Lord Illingworth, about the drum?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I was merely talking to Mrs. Allonby about the leading articles in the London newspapers.

LADY HUNSTANTON

But do you believe all that is written in the newspapers?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I do. Now-a-days it is only the unreadable that occurs. [*Rises with Mrs. Allonby.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON

Are you going, Mrs. Allonby?

MRS. ALLONBY

Just as far as the conservatory. Lord Illingworth told me this morning that there was an orchid there as beautiful as the seven deadly sins.

LADY HUNSTANTON

My dear, I hope there is nothing of the kind. I will certainly speak to the gardener.

[*Exit Mrs. Allonby and Lord Illingworth.*]

LADY CAROLINE

Remarkable type, Mrs. Allonby.

LADY HUNSTANTON

She lets her clever tongue run away with her sometimes.

LADY CAROLINE

Is that the only thing, Jane, Mrs. Allonby allows to run away with her?

LADY HUNSTANTON

I hope so, Caroline, I am sure.

[*Enter Lord Alfred.*]

Dear Lord Alfred, do join us. [*Lord Alfred sits down beside Lady Stutfield.*]

LADY CAROLINE

You believe good of every one, Jane. It is a great fault.

LADY STUTFIELD

Do you really, really think, Lady Caroline, that one should believe evil of every one?

LADY CAROLINE

I think it is much safer to do so, Lady Stutfield. Until, of course, people are found out to be good. But that requires a great deal of investigation, now-a-days.

LADY STUTFIELD

But there is so much unkind scandal in modern life.

LADY CAROLINE

Lord Illingworth remarked to me last night at dinner that the basis of every scandal is an absolutely immoral certainty.

KELVIL

Lord Illingworth is, of course, a very brilliant

man, but he seems to me to be lacking in that fine faith in the nobility and purity of life which is so important in this country.

LADY STUTFIELD

Yes, quite, quite important, is it not?

KELVIL

He gives me the impression of a man who does not appreciate the beauty of our English home-life. I would say that he was tainted with foreign ideas on the subject.

LADY STUTFIELD

There is nothing, nothing like the beauty of home-life, is there?

KELVIL

It is the mainstay of our moral system in England, Lady Stutfield. Without it we would become like our neighbours.

LADY STUTFIELD

That would be so, so sad, would it not?

KELVIL

I am afraid, too, that Lord Illingworth regards woman simply as a toy. Now, I have never regarded woman as a toy. Woman is the

intellectual helpmeet of man in public as in private life. Without her we should forget the true ideals. [*Sits down beside Lady Stutfield.*]

LADY STUTFIELD

I am so very, very glad to hear you say that.

LADY CAROLINE

You a married man, Mr. Kettle?

SIR JOHN

Kelvil, dear, Kelvil.

KELVIL

I am married, Lady Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE

Family?

KELVIL

Yes.

LADY CAROLINE

How many?

KELVIL

Eight.

[*Lady Stutfield turns her attention to Lord Alfred.*]

LADY CAROLINE

Mrs. Kettle and the children are, I suppose, at the seaside? [*Sir John shrugs his shoulders.*]

KELVIL

My wife is at the seaside with the children, Lady Caroline.

LADY CAROLINE

You will join them later on, no doubt?

KELVIL

If my public engagements permit me.

LADY CAROLINE

Your public life must be a great source of gratification to Mrs. Kettle.

SIR JOHN

Kelvil, my love, Kelvil.

LADY STUTFIELD

[*To Lord Alfred.*] How very, very charming those gold-tipped cigarettes of yours are, Lord Alfred.

LORD ALFRED

They are awfully expensive. I can only afford them when I'm in debt.

LADY STUTFIELD

It must be terribly, terribly distressing to be in debt.

LORD ALFRED

One must have some occupation now-a-days. If I hadn't my debts I shouldn't have anything to think about. All the chaps I know are in debt.

LADY STUTFIELD

But don't the people to whom you owe the money give you a great, great deal of annoyance?

[*Enter Footman.*]

LORD ALFRED

Oh, no, they write; I don't.

LADY STUTFIELD

How very, very strange.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Ah, here is a letter, Caroline, from dear Mrs. Arbuthnot. She won't dine. I am so sorry.

But she will come in the evening. I am very pleased indeed. She is one of the sweetest of women. Writes a beautiful hand too, so large, so firm. [*Hands letter to Lady Caroline.*]

LADY STUTFIELD

[*Looking at it.*] A little lacking in femininity, Jane. Femininity is the quality I admire most in women.

LADY HUNSTANTON

[*Taking back letter and leaving it on table.*] Oh! she is very feminine, Caroline, and so good too. You should hear what the Archdeacon says of her. He regards her as his right hand in the parish. [*Footman speaks to her.*] In the Yellow Drawing-room. Shall we all go in? Lady Stutfield, shall we go in to tea?

LADY STUTFIELD

With pleasure, Lady Hunstanton. [*They rise and proceed to go off. Sir John offers to carry Lady Stutfield's cloak.*]

LADY CAROLINE

John! If you would allow your nephew to

look after Lady Stutfield's cloak, you might help me with my workbasket.

[*Enter Lord Illingworth and Mrs. Allonby.*]

SIR JOHN

Certainly my love. [*Exeunt.*]

MRS. ALLONBY

Curious thing, plain women are always jealous of their husbands, beautiful women never are!

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Beautiful women never have time. They are always so occupied in being jealous of other people's husbands.

MRS. ALLONBY

I should have thought Lady Caroline would have grown tired of conjugal anxiety by this time! Sir John is her fourth!

LORD ILLINGWORTH

So much marriage is certainly not becoming. Twenty years of romance make a woman look like a ruin; but twenty years of marriage make her something like a public building.

MRS. ALLONBY

Twenty years of romance! Is there such a thing?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Not in our day. Women have become too brilliant. Nothing spoils a romance so much as a sense of humour in the woman.

MRS. ALLONBY

Or the want of it in the man.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

You are quite right. In a Temple every one should be serious, except the thing that is worshipped.

MRS. ALLONBY

And that should be man?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Women kneel so gracefully; men don't.

MRS. ALLONBY

You are thinking of Lady Stutfield!

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I assure you I have not thought of Lady Stutfield for the last quarter of an hour.

MRS. ALLONBY

Is she such a mystery?

LORD ILLINGWORTH.

She is more than a mystery—she is a mood.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Moods don't last.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

It is their chief charm.

[*Enter Hester and Gerald.*]

GERALD

Lord Illingworth, every one has been congratulating me, Lady Hunstanton and Lady Caroline, and . . . every one. I hope I shall make a good secretary.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

You will be the pattern secretary, Gerald. [*Talks to him.*]

MRS. ALLONBY

You enjoy country life, Miss Worsley?

HESTER

Very much indeed.

MRS. ALLONBY

Don't find yourself longing for a London dinner-party?

HESTER

I dislike London dinner-parties.

MRS. ALLONBY

I adore them. The clever people never listen, and the stupid people never talk.

HESTER

I think the stupid people talk a great deal.

MRS. ALLONBY

Ah, I never listen!

LORD ILLINGWORTH

My dear boy, if I didn't like you I wouldn't have made you the offer. It is because I like you so much that I want to have you with me.

[*Exit Hester with Gerald.*]

Charming fellow, Gerald Arbuthnot!

MRS. ALLONBY

He is very nice; very nice indeed. But I can't stand the American young lady.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Why?

MRS. ALLONBY

She told me yesterday, and in quite a loud

voice too, that she was only eighteen. It was most annoying.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

One should never trust a woman who tells one her real age. A woman who would tell one that would tell one anything.

MRS. ALLONBY

She is a Puritan besides——

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Ah, that is inexcusable. I don't mind plain women being Puritans. It is the only excuse they have for being plain. But she is decidedly pretty. I admire her immensely. [*Looks steadfastly at Mrs. Allonby.*]

MRS. ALLONBY

What a thoroughly bad man you must be!

LORD ILLINGWORTH

What do you call a bad man?

MRS. ALLONBY

The sort of man who admires innocence.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

And a bad woman?

MRS. ALLONBY

Oh! the sort of woman a man never gets tired of.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

You are severe—on yourself.

MRS. ALLONBY

Define us as a sex.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Sphinxes without secrets.

MRS. ALLONBY

Does that include the Puritan women?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Do you know, I don't believe in the existence of Puritan women? I don't think there is a woman in the world would not be a little flattered if one made love to her. It is that which makes women so irresistibly adorable.

MRS. ALLONBY

You think there is no woman in the world who would object to being kissed?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Very few.

MRS. ALLONBY

Miss Worsley would not let you kiss her.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Are you sure?

MRS. ALLONBY

Quite.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

What do you think she'd do if I kissed her?

MRS. ALLONBY

Either marry you, or strike you across the face with her glove. What would you do if she struck you across the face with her glove?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Fall in love with her, probably.

MRS. ALLONBY

Then it is lucky you are not going to kiss her!

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Is that a challenge?

MRS. ALLONBY

It is an arrow shot into the air.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Don't you know that I always succeed in whatever I try?

MRS. ALLONBY

I am sorry to hear it. We women adore failures. They lean on us.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

You worship successes. You cling to them.

MRS. ALLONBY

We are the laurels to hide their baldness.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

And they need you always, except at the moment of triumph.

MRS. ALLONBY

They are uninteresting then.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

How tantalising you are! [*A pause.*]

MRS. ALLONBY

Lord Illingworth, there is one thing I shall always like you for.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Only one thing? And I have so many bad qualities.

MRS. ALLONBY

Ah, don't be too conceited about them. You may lose them as you grow old.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I never intend to grow old. The soul is born old but grows young. That is the comedy of life.

MRS. ALLONBY

And the body is born young and grows old. That is life's tragedy.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Its comedy also, sometimes. But what is the mysterious reason why you will always like me?

MRS. ALLONBY

It is that you have never made love to me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I have never done anything else.

MRS. ALLONBY

Really? I have not noticed it.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

How fortunate! It might have been a tragedy for both of us.

MRS. ALLONBY

We should each have survived.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

One can survive everything now-a-days, except death, and live down anything except a good reputation.

MRS. ALLONBY

Have you tried a good reputation?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

It is one of the many annoyances to which I have never been subjected.

MRS. ALLONBY

It may come.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Why do you threaten me?

MRS. ALLONBY

I will tell you when you have kissed the Puritan.

[*Enter Footman.*]

FRANCIS

Tea is served in the Yellow Drawing-room, my lord.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Tell her ladyship we are coming in. [*Exit.*]

FRANCIS

Yes, my lord.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Shall we go in to tea?

MRS. ALLONBY

Do you like such simple pleasures?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I adore simple pleasures. They are the last refuge of the complex. But, if you wish, let us stay here. Yes, let us stay here. The Book of Life begins with a man and a woman in a garden.

MRS. ALLONBY

It ends with Revelations.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

You fence divinely. But the button has come off your foil.

MRS. ALLONBY

I have still the mask.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

It makes your eyes lovelier.

MRS. ALLONBY

Thank you. Come.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

[*Sees Mrs. Arbuthnot's letter on table, and takes it up and looks at envelope.*] What a curious handwriting! It reminds me of the handwriting of a woman I used to know years ago.

MRS. ALLONBY

Who?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Oh! no one. No one in particular. A woman of no importance. [*Throws letter down, and passes up the steps of the terrace with Mrs. Allonby. They smile at each other.*]

ACT-DROP.

SECOND ACT.

SCENE—*Drawing-room at Hunstanton, after dinner, lamps lit. Door L.C. Door R.C.*

[*Ladies seated on sofas.*]

MRS. ALLONBY

What a comfort it is to have got rid of the men for a little!

LADY STUTFIELD

Yes; men persecute us dreadfully, don't they?

MRS. ALLONBY

Persecute us? I wish they did.

LADY HUNSTANTON

My dear!

MRS. ALLONBY

The annoying thing is that the wretches can be perfectly happy without us. That is why I

think it is every woman's duty never to leave them alone for a single moment, except during this short breathing space after dinner; without which I believe we poor women would be absolutely worn to shadows.

[*Enter Servants with coffee.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON

Worn to shadows, dear?

MRS. ALLONBY

Yes, Lady Hunstanton. It is such a strain keeping men up to the mark. They are always trying to escape from us.

LADY STUTFIELD

It seems to me that it is we who are always trying to escape from them. Men are so very, very heartless. They know their power and use it.

LADY CAROLINE

[*Takes coffee from Servant.*] What stuff and nonsense all this about men is! The thing to do is to keep men in their proper place.

MRS. ALLONBY

But what is their proper place, Lady Caroline?

LADY CAROLINE

Looking after their wives, Mrs. Allonby.

MRS. ALLONBY

[*Takes coffee from Servant.*] Really? And if they're not married?

LADY CAROLINE

If they are not married, they should be looking after a wife. It's perfectly scandalous the amount of bachelors who are going about society. There should be a law passed to compel them all to marry within twelve months.

LADY STUTFIELD

[*Refuses coffee.*] But if they're in love with some one who, perhaps, is tied to another?

LADY CAROLINE

In that case, Lady Stutfield, they should be married off in a week to some plain respectable girl, in order to teach them not to meddle with other people's property.

MRS. ALLONBY

I don't think that we should ever be spoken of as other people's property. All men are married women's property. That is the only true definition of what married women's property really is. But we don't belong to any one.

LADY STUTFIELD

Oh, I am so very, very glad to hear you say so.

LADY HUNSTANTON

But do you really think, dear Caroline, that legislation would improve matters in any way? I am told that, now-a-days, all the married men live like bachelors, and all the bachelors like married men.

MRS. ALLONBY

I certainly never know one from the other.

LADY STUTFIELD

Oh, I think one can always know at once whether a man has home claims upon his life or not. I have noticed a very, very sad expression in the eyes of so many married men.

MRS. ALLONBY

Ah, all that I have noticed is that they are horribly tedious when they are good husbands, and abominably conceited when they are not.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Well, I suppose the type of husband has completely changed since my young days, but I'm bound to state that poor dear Hunstanton was the most delightful of creatures, and as good as gold.

MRS. ALLONBY

Ah, my husband is a sort of promissory note. I am tired of meeting him.

LADY CAROLINE

But you renew him from time to time, don't you?

MRS. ALLONBY

Oh, no, lady Caroline. I have only had one husband as yet. I suppose you look upon me as quite an amateur.

LADY CAROLINE

With your views on life I wonder you married at all.

MRS. ALLONBY

So do I.

LADY HUNSTANTON

My dear child, I believe you are really very happy in your married life, but that you like to hide your happiness from others.

MRS. ALLONBY

I assure you I was horribly deceived in Ernest.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Oh, I hope not, dear. I knew his mother quite well. She was a Stratton, Caroline, one of Lord Crowland's daughters.

LADY CAROLINE

Victoria Stratton? I remember her perfectly. A silly fair-haired woman with no chin.

MRS. ALLONBY

Ah, Ernest has a chin. He has a very strong chin, a square chin. Ernest's chin is far too square.

LADY STUTFIELD

But do you really think a man's chin can be too square? I think a man should look very, very strong, and that his chin should be quite, quite square.

MRS. ALLONBY

Then you should certainly know Ernest, Lady Stutfield. It is only fair to tell you beforehand he has got no conversation at all.

LADY STUTFIELD

I adore silent men.

MRS. ALLONBY

Oh, Ernest isn't silent. He talks the whole time. But he has got no conversation. What he talks about I don't know. I haven't listened to him for years.

LADY STUTFIELD

Have you never forgiven him then? How sad that seems! But all life is very, very sad, is it not?

MRS. ALLONBY

Life, Lady Stutfield, is simply a *mauvais quart d'heure* made up of exquisite moments.

LADY STUTFIELD

Yes, there are moments, certainly. But was it something very, very wrong that Mr. Allonby did? Did he become angry with you, and say anything that was unkind or true?

MRS. ALLONBY

Oh dear, no. Ernest is invariably calm. That is one of the reasons he always gets on my nerves. Nothing is so aggravating as calmness. There is something positively brutal about the good temper of most modern men. I wonder we women stand it as well as we do.

LADY STUTFIELD

Yes; men's good temper shows they are not so sensitive as we are, not so finely strung. It makes a great barrier often between husband and wife, does it not? But I would so much like to know what was the wrong thing Mr. Allonby did.

MRS. ALLONBY

Well, I will tell you, if you solemnly promise to tell everybody else.

LADY STUTFIELD

Thank you, thank you. I will make a point of repeating it.

MRS. ALLONBY

When Ernest and I were engaged he swore to me positively on his knees that he never had loved any one before in the whole course of his life. I was very young at the time, so I didn't believe him, I needn't tell you. Unfortunately, however, I made no enquiries of any kind till after I had been actually married four or five months. I found out then that what he had told me was perfectly true. And that sort of thing makes a man so absolutely uninteresting.

LADY HUNSTANTON

My dear!

MRS. ALLONBY

Men always want to be a woman's first love. That is their clumsy vanity. We women have a more subtle instinct about things. What we like is to be a man's last romance.

LADY STUTFIELD

I see what you mean. It's very, very beautiful.

LADY HUNSTANTON

My dear child, you don't mean to tell me that you won't forgive your husband because he never loved any one else? Did you ever hear such a thing, Caroline? I am quite surprised.

LADY CAROLINE

Oh, women have become so highly educated, Jane, that nothing should surprise us now-a-days, except happy marriages. They apparently are getting remarkably rare.

MRS. ALLONBY

Oh, they're quite out of date.

LADY STUTFIELD

Except amongst the middle classes, I have been told.

MRS. ALLONBY

How like the middle classes!

LADY STUTFIELD

Yes—is it not?—very, very like them.

LADY CAROLINE

If what you tell us about the middle classes is true, Lady Stutfield, it redounds greatly to

their credit. It is much to be regretted that in our rank of life the wife should be so persistently frivolous, under the impression apparently that it is the proper thing to be. It is to that I attribute the unhappiness of so many marriages we all know of in society.

MRS. ALLONBY

Do you know, Lady Caroline, I don't think the frivolity of the wife has ever anything to do with it. More marriages are ruined now-a-days by the common sense of the husband than by anything else. How can a woman be expected to be happy with a man who insists on treating her as if she were a perfectly rational being?

LADY HUNSTANTON

My dear!

MRS. ALLONBY

Man, poor, awkward, reliable, necessary man belongs to a sex that has been rational for millions and millions of years. He can't help himself. It is in his race. The History of Woman is very different. We have always been picturesque protests against the mere existence of

common sense. We saw its dangers from the first.

LADY STUTFIELD

Yes, the common sense of husbands is certainly most, most trying. Do tell me your conception of the Ideal Husband. I think it would be so very, very helpful.

MRS. ALLONBY

The Ideal Husband? There couldn't be such a thing. The institution is wrong.

LADY STUTFIELD

The Ideal Man, then, in his relations to *us*.

LADY CAROLINE

He would probably be extremely realistic.

MRS. ALLONBY

The Ideal Man! Oh, the Ideal Man should talk to us as if we were goddesses, and treat us as if we were children. He should refuse all our serious requests, and gratify every one of our whims. He should encourage us to have caprices, and forbid us to have missions. He should always say much more than he means, and always mean much more than he says.

LADY HUNSTANTON

But how could he do both, dear?

MRS. ALLONBY

He should never run down other pretty women. That would show he had no taste, or make one suspect that he had too much. No; he should be nice about them all, but say that somehow they don't attract him.

LADY STUTFIELD

Yes, that is always very, very pleasant to hear about other women.

MRS. ALLONBY

If we ask him a question about anything, he should give us an answer all about ourselves. He should invariably praise us for whatever qualities he knows we haven't got. But he should be pitiless, quite pitiless, in reproaching us for the virtues that we have never dreamed of possessing. He should never believe that we know the use of useful things. That would be unforgiveable. But he should shower on us everything we don't want.

LADY CAROLINE

As far as I can see, he is to do nothing but pay bills and compliments.

MRS. ALLONBY

He should persistently compromise us in public, and treat us with absolute respect when we are alone. And yet he should be always ready to have a perfectly terrible scene, whenever we want one, and to become miserable, absolutely miserable, at a moment's notice, and to overwhelm us with just reproaches in less than twenty minutes, and to be positively violent at the end of half an hour, and to leave us for ever at a quarter to eight, when we have to go and dress for dinner. And when, after that, one has seen him for really the last time, and he has refused to take back the little things he has given one, and promised never to communicate with one again, or to write one any foolish letters, he should be perfectly broken-hearted, and telegraph to one all day long, and send one little notes every half-hour by a private hansom, and dine quite alone at the club, so that every one should know how unhappy he was. And after

a whole dreadful week, during which one has gone about everywhere with one's husband, just to show how absolutely lonely one was, he may be given a third last parting, in the evening, and then, if his conduct has been quite irreproachable, and one has behaved really badly to him, he should be allowed to admit that he has been entirely in the wrong, and when he has admitted that, it becomes a woman's duty to forgive, and one can do it all over again from the beginning, with variations.

LADY HUNSTANTON

How clever you are, my dear! You never mean a single word you say.

LADY STUTFIELD

Thank you, thank you. It has been quite, quite entrancing. I must try and remember it all. There are such a number of details that are so very, very important.

LADY CAROLINE

But you have not told us yet what the reward of the Ideal Man is to be.

MRS. ALLONBY

His reward? Oh, infinite expectation. That is quite enough for him.

LADY STUTFIELD

But men are so terribly, terribly exacting, are they not?

MRS. ALLONBY

That makes no matter. One should never surrender.

LADY STUTFIELD

Not even to the Ideal Man?

MRS. ALLONBY

Certainly not to him. Unless, of course, one wants to grow tired of him.

LADY STUTFIELD

Oh! . . . yes. I see that. It is very, very helpful. Do you think, Mrs. Allonby, I shall ever meet the Ideal Man? Or are there more than one?

MRS. ALLONEY

There are just four in London, Lady Stutfield.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Oh, my dear!

MRS. ALLONBY [*Going over to her.*]

What has happened? Do tell me.

LADY HUNSTANTON [*in a low voice.*]

I had completely forgotten that the American young lady has been in the room all the time. I am afraid some of this clever talk may have shocked her a little.

MRS. ALLONBY

Ah, that will do her so much good!

LADY HUNSTANTON

Let us hope she didn't understand much. I think I had better go over and talk to her. [*Rises and goes across to Hester Worsley.*] Well, dear Miss Worsley. [*Sitting down beside her.*] How quiet you have been in your nice little corner all this time! I suppose you have been reading a book? There are so many books here in the library.

HESTER

No, I have been listening to the conversation

LADY HUNSTANTON

You mustn't believe everything that was said, you know, dear.

HESTER

I didn't believe any of it.

LADY HUNSTANTON

That is quite right, dear.

HESTER

[*Continuing.*] I couldn't believe that any women could really hold such views of life as I have heard to-night from some of your guests. [*An awkward pause.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON

I hear you have such pleasant society in America. Quite like our own in places, my son wrote to me.

HESTER

There are cliques in America as elsewhere, Lady Hunstanton. But true American society consists simply of all the good women and good men we have in our country.

LADY HUNSTANTON

What a sensible system, and I dare say quite

pleasant, too. I am afraid in England we have too many artificial social barriers. We don't see as much as we should of the middle and lower classes.

HESTER

In America we have no lower classes.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Really? What a very strange arrangement!

MRS. ALLONBY

What is that dreadful girl talking about?

LADY STUTFIELD

She is painfully natural, is she not?

LADY CAROLINE

There are a great many things you haven't got in America, I am told, Miss Worsley. They say you have no ruins, and no curiosities.

MRS. ALLONBY

[*To Lady Stutfield.*] What nonsense! They have their mothers and their manners.

HESTER

The English aristocracy supply us with our

curiosities, Lady Caroline. They are sent over to us every summer, regularly, in the steamers, and propose to us the day after they land. As for ruins, we are trying to build up something that will last longer than brick and stone. [*Gets up to take her fan from table.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON

What is that, dear? Ah, yes, an iron Exhibition, is it not, at that place that has the curious name?

HESTER

[*Standing by table.*] We are trying to build up life, Lady Hunstanton, on a better, truer, purer basis than life rests on here. This sounds strange to you all, no doubt. How could it sound other than strange? You rich people in England, you don't know how you are living. How could you know? You shut out from your society the gentle and the good. You laugh at the simple and the pure. Living, as you all do, on others and by them, you sneer at self-sacrifice, and if you throw bread to the poor, it is merely to keep them quiet for a season. With all your pomp and wealth and art

you don't know how to live—you don't even know that. You love the beauty that you can see and touch and handle, the beauty that you can destroy, and do destroy, but of the unseen beauty of life, of the unseen beauty of a higher life, you know nothing. You have lost life's secret. Oh, your English society seems to me shallow, selfish, foolish. It has blinded its eyes, and stopped its ears. It lies like a leper in purple. It sits like a dead thing smeared with gold. It is all wrong, all wrong.

LADY STUTFIELD

I don't think one should know of these things. It is not very, very nice, is it?

LADY HUNSTANTON

My dear Miss Worsley, I thought you liked English society so much. You were such a success in it. And you were so much admired by the best people. I quite forget what Lord Henry Weston said of you—but it was most complimentary, and you know what an authority he is on beauty.

HESTER

Lord Henry Weston! I remember him, Lady

Hunstanton. A man with a hideous smile and a hideous past. He is asked everywhere. No dinner-party is complete without him. What of those whose ruin is due to him? They are outcasts. They are nameless. If you met them in the street you would turn your head away. I don't complain of their punishment. Let all women who have sinned be punished.

[*Mrs. Arbuthnot enters from terrace behind in a cloak with a lace veil over her head. She hears the last words and starts.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON

My dear young lady!

HESTER

It is right that they should be punished, but don't let them be the only ones to suffer. If a man and woman have sinned, let them both go forth into the desert to love or loathe each other there. Let them both be branded. Set a mark, if you wish, on each, but don't punish the one and let the other go free. Don't have one law for men and another for women. You are unjust to women in England. And till you count what is a shame in a woman to be an

infamy in a man, you will always be unjust, and Right, that pillar of fire, and Wrong, that pillar of cloud, will be made dim to your eyes, or be not seen at all, or if seen, not regarded.

LADY CAROLINE

Might I, dear Miss Worsley, as you are standing up, ask you for my cotton that is just behind you? Thank you.

LADY HUNSTANTON

My dear Mrs. Arbuthnot! I am so pleased you have come up. But I didn't hear you announced.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Oh, I came straight in from the terrace, Lady Hunstanton, just as I was. You didn't tell me you had a party.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Not a party. Only a few guests who are staying in the house, and whom you must know. Allow me. [*Tries to help her. Rings bell.*] Caroline, this is Mrs. Arbuthnot, one of my sweetest friends. Lady Caroline Pontefract, Lady Stutfield, Mrs. Allonby, and my young

American friend, Miss Worsley, who has just been telling us all how wicked we are.

HESTER

I am afraid you think I spoke too strongly, Lady Hunstanton. But there are some things in England—

LADY HUNSTANTON

My dear young lady, there was a great deal of truth, I dare say, in what you said, and you looked very pretty while you said it, which is much more important, Lord Illingworth would tell us. The only point where I thought you were a little hard was about Lady Caroline's brother, about poor Lord Henry. He is really such good company.

[*Enter Footman.*]

Take Mrs. Arbuthnot's things.

[*Exit Footman with wraps.*]

HESTER

Lady Caroline, I had no idea it was your brother. I am sorry for the pain I must have caused you—I—

LADY CAROLINE

My dear Miss Worsley, the only part of your

little speech, if I may so term it, with which I thoroughly agreed, was the part about my brother. Nothing that you could possibly say could be too bad for him. I regard Henry as infamous, absolutely infamous. But I am bound to state, as you were remarking, Jane, that he is excellent company, and he has one of the best cooks in London, and after a good dinner one can forgive anybody, even one's own relations.

LADY HUNSTANTON [*to Miss Worsley.*]

Now, do come, dear, and make friends with Mrs. Arbuthnot. She is one of the good, sweet, simple people you told us we never admitted into society. I am sorry to say Mrs. Arbuthnot comes very rarely to me. But that is not my fault.

MRS. ALLONBY

What a bore it is the men staying so long after dinner! I expect they are saying the most dreadful things about us.

LADY STUTFIELD

Do you really think so?

MRS. ALLONBY

I am sure of it.

LADY STUTFIELD

How very, very horrid of them! Shall we go on to the terrace?

MRS. ALLONBY

Oh, anything to get away from the dowagers and the dowdies. [*Rises and goes with Lady Stutfield to door L.C.*] We are only going to look at the stars, Lady Hunstanton.

LADY HUNSTANTON

You will find a great many, dear, a great many. But don't catch cold. [*To Mrs. Arbuthnot.*] We shall all miss Gerald so much, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

But has Lord Illingworth really offered to make Gerald his secretary?

LADY HUNSTANTON

Oh, yes! He has been most charming about it. He has the highest possible opinion of your boy. You don't know Lord Illingworth, I believe, dear.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I have never met him.

LADY HUNSTANTON

You know him by name, no doubt?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I am afraid I don't. I live so much out of the world, and see so few people. I remember hearing years ago of an old Lord Illingworth who lived in Yorkshire, I think.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Ah, yes. That would be the last Earl but one. He was a very curious man. He wanted to marry beneath him. Or wouldn't, I believe. There was some scandal about it. The present Lord Illingworth is quite different. He is very distinguished. He does—well, he does nothing, which I am afraid our pretty American visitor here thinks very wrong of anybody, and I don't know that he cares much for the subjects in which you are so interested, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot. Do you think, Caroline, that Lord Illingworth is interested in the Housing of the Poor?

LADY CAROLINE

I should fancy not at all, Jane.

LADY HUNSTANTON

We all have our different tastes, have we not?

But Lord Illingworth has a very high position, and there is nothing he couldn't get if he chose to ask for it. Of course, he is comparatively a young man still, and he has only come to his title within—how long exactly is it, Caroline, since Lord Illingworth succeeded?

LADY CAROLINE

About four years, I think, Jane. I know it was the same year in which my brother had his last exposure in the evening newspapers.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Ah, I remember. That would be about four years ago. Of course, there were a great many people between the present Lord Illingworth and the title, Mrs. Arbuthnot. There was—who was there, Caroline?

LADY CAROLINE

There was poor Margaret's baby. You remember how anxious she was to have a boy, and it was a boy, but it died, and her husband died shortly afterwards, and she married almost immediately one of Lord Ascot's sons, who, I am told, beats her.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Ah, that is in the family, dear, that is in the family. And there was also, I remember, a clergyman who wanted to be a lunatic, or a lunatic who wanted to be a clergyman, I forget which, but I know the Court of Chancery investigated the matter, and decided that he was quite sane. And I saw him afterwards at poor Lord Plumstead's with straws in his hair, or something very odd about him. I can't recall what. I often regret, Lady Caroline, that dear Lady Cecilia never lived to see her son get the title.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Lady Cecilia?

LADY HUNSTANTON

Lord Illingworth's mother, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot, was one of the Duchess of Jerningham's pretty daughters, and she married Sir Thomas Harford, who wasn't considered a very good match for her at the time, though he was said to be the handsomest man in London. I knew them all quite intimately, and both the sons, Arthur and George.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

It was the eldest son who succeeded, of course, Lady Hunstanton?

LADY HUNSTANTON

No, dear, he was killed in the hunting field. Or was it fishing, Caroline? I forget. But George came in for everything. I always tell him that no younger son has ever had such good luck as he has had.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Lady Hunstanton, I want to speak to Gerald at once. Might I see him? Can he be sent for?

LADY HUNSTANTON

Certainly, dear. I will send one of the servants into the dining-room to fetch him. I don't know what keeps the gentlemen so long. [*Rings bell.*] When I knew Lord Illingworth first as plain George Harford, he was simply a very brilliant young man about town, with not a penny of money except what poor dear Lady Cecilia gave him. She was quite devoted to him. Chiefly, I fancy, because he was on bad terms with his father. Oh, here is the dear Archdeacon. [*To Servant.*] It doesn't matter.

[*Enter Sir John and Doctor Daubeny. Sir John goes over to Lady Stutfield, Doctor Daubeny to Lady Hunstanton.*]

THE ARCHDEACON

Lord Illingworth has been most entertaining. I have never enjoyed myself more. [*Sees Mrs. Arbuthnot.*] Ah, Mrs. Arbuthnot.

LADY HUNSTANTON

[*To Doctor Daubeny.*] You see I have got Mrs. Arbuthnot to come to me at last.

THE ARCHDEACON

That is a great honour, Lady Hunstanton. Mrs. Daubeny will be quite jealous of you.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Ah, I am so sorry Mrs. Daubeny could not come with you to-night. Headache as usual, I suppose.

THE ARCHDEACON

Yes, Lady Hunstanton; a perfect martyr. But she is happiest alone. She is happiest alone.

LADY CAROLINE

[*To her husband.*] John! [*Sir John goes over to his wife. Doctor Daubeny talks to Lady Hunstanton and Mrs. Arbuthnot.*]

[*Mrs. Arbuthnot watches Lord Illingworth the whole time. He has passed across the room without noticing her, and approaches Mrs. Allonby, who with Lady Stutfield is standing by the door looking on to the terrace.*]

LORD ILLINGWORTH

How is the most charming woman in the world?

MRS. ALLONBY

[*Taking Lady Stutfield by the hand.*] We are both quite well, thank you, Lord Illingworth. But what a short time you have been in the dining-room. It seems as if we had only just left.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I was bored to death. Never opened my lips the whole time. Absolutely longing to come in to you.

MRS. ALLONBY

You should have. The American girl has been giving us a lecture.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Really? All Americans lecture, I believe. I suppose it is something in their climate. What did she lecture about?

MRS. ALLONBY

Oh, Puritanism, of course.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I am going to convert her, am I not? How long do you give me?

MRS. ALLONBY

A week.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

A week is more than enough.

[*Enter Gerald and Lord Alfred.*]

GERALD

[*Going to Mrs. Arbuthnot.*] Dear mother!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Gerald, I don't feel at all well. See me home, Gerald. I shouldn't have come.

GERALD

I am so sorry, mother. Certainly. But you must know Lord Illingworth first. [*Goes across room.*]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Not to-night, Gerald.

GERALD

Lord Illingworth, I want you so much to know my mother.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

With the greatest pleasure. [*To Mrs. Allonby.*] I'll be back in a moment. People's mothers always bore me to death. All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy.

MRS. ALLONBY

No man does. That is his.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

What a delightful mood you are in to-night! [*Turns round and goes across with Gerald to*

Mrs. Arbuthnot. When he sees her, he starts back in wonder. Then slowly his eyes turn towards Gerald.]

GERALD

Mother, this is Lord Illingworth, who has offered to take me as his private secretary. [*Mrs. Arbuthnot bows coldly.*] It is a wonderful opening for me, isn't it? I hope he won't be disappointed in me, that is all. You'll thank Lord Illingworth, mother, won't you?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Lord Illingworth is very good, I am sure, to interest himself in you for the moment.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

[*Putting his hand on Gerald's shoulder.*] Oh, Gerald and I are great friends, already, Mrs. . . . Arbuthnot.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

There can be nothing in common between you and my son, Lord Illingworth.

GERALD

Dear mother, how can you say so? Of course, Lord Illingworth is awfully clever and that sort

of thing. There is nothing Lord Illingworth doesn't know.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

My dear boy!

GERALD

He knows more about life than any one I have ever met. I feel an awful duffer when I am with you, Lord Illingworth. Of course, I have had so few advantages. I have not been to Eton or Oxford like other chaps. But Lord Illingworth doesn't seem to mind that. He has been awfully good to me, mother.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Lord Illingworth may change his mind. He may not really want you as his secretary.

GERALD

Mother!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

You must remember, as you said yourself, you have had so few advantages.

MRS. ALLONBY

Lord Illingworth, I want to speak to you for a moment. Do come over.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Will you excuse me, Mrs. Arbuthnot? Now, don't let your charming mother make any more difficulties, Gerald. The thing is quite settled, isn't it?

GERALD

I hope so. [*Lord Illingworth goes across to Mrs. Allonby.*]

MRS. ALLONBY

I thought you were never going to leave the lady in black velvet.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

She is excessively handsome. [*Looks at Mrs. Arbuthnot.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON

Caroline, shall we all make a move to the music-room? Miss Worsley is going to play. You'll come too, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot, won't you? You don't know what a treat is in store for you. [*To Doctor Daubeny.*] I must really take Miss Worsley down some afternoon to the rectory. I should so much like dear Mrs. Daubeny to hear her on the violin. Ah, I forgot.

Dear Mrs. Daubeny's hearing is a little defective, is it not?

THE ARCHDEACON

Her deafness is a great privation to her. She can't even hear my sermons now. She reads them at home. But she has many resources in herself, many resources.

LADY HUNSTANTON

She reads a good deal, I suppose?

THE ARCHDEACON

Just the very largest print. The eyesight is rapidly going. But she's never morbid, never morbid.

GERALD

[*To Lord Illingworth.*] Do speak to my mother, Lord Illingworth, before you go into the music-room. She seems to think, somehow, you don't mean what you said to me.

MRS. ALLONBY

Aren't you coming?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

In a few moments. Lady Hunstanton, if Mrs.

Arbuthnot would allow me, I would like to say a few words to her, and we will join you later on.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Ah, of course. You will have a great deal to say to her, and she will have a great deal to thank you for. It is not every son who gets such an offer, Mrs. Arbuthnot. But I know you appreciate that, dear.

LADY CAROLINE

John!

LADY HUNSTANTON

Now, don't keep Mrs. Arbuthnot too long, Lord Illingworth. We can't spare her.

[*Exit following the other guests. Sound of violin heard from music-room.*]

LORD ILLINGWORTH

So that is our son, Rachel! Well, I am very proud of him. He is a Harford, every inch of him. By the way, why Arbuthnot, Rachel?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

One name is as good as another, when one has no right to any name.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I suppose so—But why Gerald?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

After a man whose heart I broke—after my father.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Well, Rachel, what is over is over. All I have got to say now is that I am very, very much pleased with our boy. The world will know him merely as my private secretary, but to me he will be something very near, and very dear. It is a curious thing, Rachel; my life seemed to be quite complete. It was not so. It lacked something, it lacked a son. I have found my son now, I am glad I have found him.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

You have no right to claim him, or the smallest part of him. The boy is entirely mine, and shall remain mine.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

My dear Rachel, you have had him to yourself for over twenty years. Why not let me have

him for a little now? He is quite as much mine as yours.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Are you talking of the child you abandoned? Of the child who, as far as you are concerned, might have died of hunger and of want?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

You forget, Rachel, it was you who left me. It was not I who left you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I left you because you refused to give the child a name. Before my son was born, I implored you to marry me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I had no expectations then. And besides, Rachel, I wasn't much older than you were. I was only twenty-two. I was twenty-one, I believe, when the whole thing began in your father's garden.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

When a man is old enough to do wrong, he should be old enough to do right also.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

My dear Rachel, intellectual generalities are always interesting, but generalities in morals mean absolutely nothing. As for saying I left our child to starve, that, of course, is untrue and silly. My mother offered you six hundred a year. But you wouldn't take anything. You simply disappeared, and carried the child away with you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I wouldn't have accepted a penny from her. Your father was different. He told you, in my presence, when we were in Paris, that it was your duty to marry me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Oh, duty is what one expects from others, it is not what one does one's-self. Of course, I was influenced by my mother. Every man is when he is young.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I am glad to hear you say so. Gerald shall certainly not go away with you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

What nonsense, Rachel!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Do you think I would allow my son——

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Our son.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

My son [*Lord Illingworth shrugs his shoulders*]— to go away with the man who spoiled my youth, who ruined my life, who has tainted every moment of my days? You don't realise what my past has been in suffering and in shame.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

My dear Rachel, I must candidly say that I think Gerald's future considerably more important than your past.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Gerald cannot separate his future from my past.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

That is exactly what he should do. That is exactly what you should help him to do. What a typical woman you are! You talk sentimentally, and you are thoroughly selfish the whole

time. But don't let us have a scene. Rachel, I want you to look at this matter from the common-sense point of view, from the point of view of what is best for our son, leaving you and me out of the question. What is our son at present? An underpaid clerk in a small Provincial Bank in a third-rate English town. If you imagine he is quite happy in such a position, you are mistaken. He is thoroughly discontented.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

He was not discontented till he met you. You have made him so.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Of course, I made him so. Discontent is the first step in the progress of a man or a nation. But I did not leave him with a mere longing for things he could not get. No, I made him a charming offer. He jumped at it, I need hardly say. Any young man would. And now, simply because it turns out that I am the boy's own father and he my own son, you propose practically to ruin his career. That is to say, if I were a perfect stranger, you would allow Gerald to go away with me, but as he is my own flesh

and blood you won't. How utterly illogical you are!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I will not allow him to go.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

How can you prevent it? What excuse can you give to him for making him decline such an offer as mine? I won't tell him in what relations I stand to him, I need hardly say. But you daren't tell him. You know that. Look how you have brought him up.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I have brought him up to be a good man.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Quite so. And what is the result? You have educated him to be your judge if he ever finds you out. And a bitter, an unjust judge he will be to you. Don't be deceived, Rachel. Children begin by loving their parents. After a time they judge them. Rarely, if ever, do they forgive them.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

George, don't take my son away from me. I

have had twenty years of sorrow, and I have only had one thing to love me, only one thing to love. You have had a life of joy, and pleasure, and success. You have been quite happy, you have never thought of us. There was no reason, according to your views of life, why you should have remembered us at all. Your meeting us was a mere accident, a horrible accident. Forget it. Don't come now, and rob me of . . . of all I have, of all I have in the whole world. You are so rich in other things. Leave me the little vineyard of my life; leave me the walled-in garden and the well of water; the ewe-lamb God sent me, in pity or in wrath, oh! leave me that. George, don't take Gerald from me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Rachel, at the present moment you are not necessary to Gerald's career; I am. There is nothing more to be said on the subject.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I will not let him go.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Here is Gerald. He has a right to decide for himself.

[*Enter Gerald.*]

GERALD

Well, dear mother, I hope you have settled it all with Lord Illingworth?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I have not, Gerald.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Your mother seems not to like your coming with me, for some reason.

GERALD

Why, mother?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I thought you were quite happy here with me, Gerald. I didn't know you were so anxious to leave me.

GERALD

Mother, how can you talk like that? Of course I have been quite happy with you. But a man can't always stay with his mother. No chap does. I want to make myself a position, to do something. I thought you would have been proud to see me Lord Illingworth's secretary.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I do not think you would be suitable as a private secretary to Lord Illingworth. You have no qualifications.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I don't wish to seem to interfere for a moment, Mrs. Arbuthnot, but as far as your last objection is concerned, I surely am the best judge. And I can only tell you that your son has all the qualifications I had hoped for. He has more, in fact, than I had even thought of. Far more. [*Mrs. Arbuthnot remains silent.*] Have you any other reason, Mrs. Arbuthnot, why you don't wish your son to accept this post?

GERALD

Have you, mother. Do answer.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

If you have, Mrs. Arbuthnot, pray, pray say it. We are quite by ourselves here. Whatever it is, I need not say, I will not repeat it.

GERALD

Mother?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

If you would like to be alone with your son, I will leave you. You may have some other reason you don't wish me to hear.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I have no other reason.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Then, my dear boy, we may look on the thing as settled. Come, you and I will smoke a cigarette on the terrace together. And Mrs. Arbuthnot, pray let me tell you, that I think you have acted very, very wisely.

[*Exit with Gerald. Mrs. Arbuthnot is left alone. She stands immobile, with a look of unutterable sorrow on her face.*]

ACT-DROP.

THIRD ACT.

SCENE—*The Picture Gallery at Hunstanton. Door at back leading on to terrace.*

[*Lord Illingworth and Gerald, R.C. Lord Illingworth lolling on a sofa. Gerald in a chair.*]

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Thoroughly sensible woman, your mother, Gerald. I knew she would come round in the end.

GERALD

My mother is awfully conscientious, Lord Illingworth, and I know she doesn't think I am educated enough to be your secretary. She is perfectly right, too. I was fearfully idle when I was at school, and I couldn't pass an examination now to save my life.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

My dear Gerald, examinations are of no value whatsoever. If a man is a gentleman, he knows quite enough, and if he is not a gentleman, whatever he knows is bad for him.

GERALD

But I am so ignorant of the world, Lord Illingworth.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Don't be afraid, Gerald. Remember that you've got on your side the most wonderful thing in the world—youth! There is nothing like youth. The middle-aged are mortgaged to Life. The old are in Life's lumber-room. But youth is the Lord of Life. Youth has a kingdom waiting for it. Every one is born a king, and most people die in exile, like most kings. To win back my youth, Gerald, there is nothing I wouldn't do—except take exercise, get up early, or be a useful member of the community.

GERALD

But you don't call yourself old, Lord Illingworth?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I am old enough to be your father, Gerald.

GERALD

I don't remember my father; he died years ago.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

So Lady Hunstanton told me.

GERALD

It is very curious, my mother never talks to me about my father. I sometimes think she must have married beneath her.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

[*Winces slightly.*] Really? [*Goes over and puts his hand on Gerald's shoulder.*] You have missed not having a father, I suppose, Gerald?

GERALD

Oh, no; my mother has been so good to me. No one ever had such a mother as I have had.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I am quite sure of that. Still I should imagine that most mothers don't quite understand their sons. Don't realise, I mean, that a son has ambitions, a desire to see life, to make himself a name. After all, Gerald, you couldn't

be expected to pass all your life in such a hole as Wrockley, could you?

GERALD

Oh, no! It would be dreadful!

LORD ILLINGWORTH

A mother's love is very touching, of course, but it is often curiously selfish. I mean, there is a good deal of selfishness in it.

GERALD

[*Slowly.*] I suppose there is.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Your mother is a thoroughly good woman. But good women have such limited views of life, their horizon is so small, their interests are so petty, aren't they?

GERALD

They are awfully interested, certainly, in things we don't care much about.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I suppose your mother is very religious, and that sort of thing.

GERALD

Oh, yes, she's always going to church.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Ah! she is not modern, and to be modern is the only thing worth being now-a-days. You want to be modern, don't you, Gerald? You want to know life as it really is. Not to be put off with any old-fashioned theories about life. Well, what you have to do at present is simply to fit yourself for the best society. A man who can dominate a London dinner-table can dominate the world. The future belongs to the dandy. It is the exquisites who are going to rule.

GERALD

I should like to wear nice things awfully, but I have always been told that a man should not think too much about his clothes.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

People now-a-days are so absolutely superficial that they don't understand the philosophy of the superficial. By the way, Gerald, you should learn how to tie your tie better. Sentiment is all very well for the button-hole. But

the essential thing for a necktie is style. A well-tied tie is the first serious step in life.

GERALD

[*Laughing.*] I might be able to learn how to tie a tie, Lord Illingworth, but I should never be able to talk as you do. I don't know how to talk.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Oh! talk to every woman as if you loved her, and to every man as if he bored you, and at the end of your first season you will have the reputation of possessing the most perfect social tact.

GERALD

But it is very difficult to get into society, isn't it?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

To get into the best society, now-a-days, one has either to feed people, amuse people, or shock people—that is all.

GERALD

I suppose society is wonderfully delightful!

LORD ILLINGWORTH

To be in it is merely a bore. But to be out

of it simply a tragedy. Society is a necessary thing. No man has any real success in this world unless he has got women to back him, and women rule society. If you have not got women on your side you are quite over. You might just as well be a barrister, or a stockbroker, or a journalist at once.

GERALD

It is very difficult to understand women, is it not?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

You should never try to understand them. Women are pictures. Men are problems. If you want to know what a woman really means —which, by the way, is always a dangerous thing to do—look at her, don't listen to her.

GERALD

But women are awfully clever, aren't they?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

One should always tell them so. But, to the philosopher, my dear Gerald, women represent the triumph of matter over mind—just as men represent the triumph of mind over morals.

GERALD

How then can women have so much power as you say they have?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

The history of women is the history of the worst form of tyranny the world has ever known. The tyranny of the weak over the strong. It is the only tyranny that lasts.

GERALD

But haven't women got a refining influence?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Nothing refines but the intellect.

GERALD

Still, there are many different kinds of women, aren't there?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Only two kinds in society: the plain and the coloured.

GERALD

But there are good women in society, aren't there?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Far too many.

GERALD

But do you think women shouldn't be good?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

One should never tell them so, they'd all become good at once. Women are a fascinatingly wilful sex. Every woman is a rebel, and usually in wild revolt against herself.

GERALD

You have never been married, Lord Illingworth, have you?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Men marry because they are tired; women because they are curious. Both are disappointed.

GERALD

But don't you think one can be happy when one is married?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Perfectly happy. But the happiness of a married man, my dear Gerald, depends on the people he has not married.

GERALD

But if one is in love?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

One should always be in love. That is the reason one should never marry.

GERALD

Love is a very wonderful thing, isn't it?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

When one is in love one begins by deceiving one's-self. And one ends by deceiving others. That is what the world calls a romance. But a really *grande passion* is comparatively rare now-a-days. It is the privilege of people who have nothing to do. That is the one use of the idle classes in a country, and the only possible explanation of us Harfords.

GERALD

Harfords, Lord Illingworth?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

That is my family name. You should study the Peerage, Gerald. It is the one book a young man about town should know thoroughly, and it is the best thing in fiction the English have ever

done. And now, Gerald, you are going now into a perfectly new life with me, and I want you to know how to live. [*Mrs. Arbuthnot appears on terrace behind.*] For the world has been made by fools that wise men should live in it!

[*Enter L.C. Lady Hunstanton and Dr. Daubeny.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON

Ah! here you are, dear Lord Illingworth. Well, I suppose you have been telling our young friend, Gerald, what his new duties are to be, and giving him a great deal of good advice over a pleasant cigarette.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I have been giving him the best of advice, Lady Hunstanton, and the best of cigarettes.

LADY HUNSTANTON

I am so sorry I was not here to listen to you, but I suppose I am too old now to learn. Except from you, dear Archdeacon, when you are in your nice pulpit. But then I always know what you are going to say, so I don't feel alarmed. [*Sees Mrs. Arbuthnot.*] Ah! dear Mrs. Arbuth-

not, do come and join us. Come, dear. [*Enter Mrs. Arbuthnot.*] Gerald has been having such a long talk with Lord Illingworth; I am sure you must feel very much flattered at the pleasant way in which everything has turned out for him. Let us sit down. [*They sit down.*] And how is your beautiful embroidery going on?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I am always at work, Lady Hunstanton.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Mrs. Daubeny embroiders a little, too, doesn't she?

THE ARCHDEACON

She was very deft with her needle once, quite a Dorcas. But the gout has crippled her fingers a good deal. She has not touched the tambour frame for nine or ten years. But she has many other amusements. She is very much interested in her own health.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Ah! that is always a nice distraction, is it not? Now, what are you talking about, Lord Illingworth? Do tell us.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I was on the point of explaining to Gerald that the world has always laughed at its own tragedies, that being the only way in which it has been able to bear them. And that, consequently, whatever the world has treated seriously belongs to the comedy side of things.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Now I am quite out of my depth. I usually am when Lord Illingworth says anything. And the Humane Society is most careless. They never rescue me. I am left to sink. I have a dim idea, dear Lord Illingworth, that you are always on the side of the sinners, and I know I always try to be on the side of the saints, but that is as far as I get. And after all, it may be merely the fancy of a drowning person.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

The only difference between the saint and the sinner is that every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Ah! that quite does for me. I haven't a word to say. You and I, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot, are

behind the age. We can't follow Lord Illingworth. Too much care was taken with our education, I am afraid. To have been well brought up is a great drawback now-a-days. It shuts one out from so much.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I should be sorry to follow Lord Illingworth in any of his opinions.

LADY HUNSTANTON

You are quite right, dear.

[*Gerald shrugs his shoulders and looks irritably over at his mother. Enter Lady Caroline.*]

LADY CAROLINE

Jane, have you seen John anywhere?

LADY HUNSTANTON

You needn't be anxious about him, dear. He is with Lady Stutfield; I saw them some time ago, in the Yellow Drawing-room. They seem quite happy together. You are not going, Caroline? Pray sit down.

LADY CAROLINE

I think I had better look after John.

[*Exit Lady Caroline.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON

It doesn't do to pay men so much attention. And Caroline has really nothing to be anxious about. Lady Stutfield is very sympathetic. She is just as sympathetic about one thing as she is about another. A beautiful nature.

[*Enter Sir John and Mrs. Allonby.*]

Ah! here is Sir John! And with Mrs. Allonby too! I suppose it was Mrs. Allonby I saw him with. Sir John, Caroline has been looking everywhere for you.

MRS. ALLONBY

We have been waiting for her in the Music-room, dear Lady Hunstanton.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Ah! the Music-room, of course. I thought it was the Yellow Drawing-room, my memory is getting so defective. [*To the Archdeacon.*] Mrs. Daubeny has a wonderful memory, hasn't she?

THE ARCHDEACON

She used to be quite remarkable for her memory, but since her last attack she recalls chiefly the events of her early childhood. But

she finds great pleasure in such retrospections, great pleasure.

[*Enter Lady Stutfield and Mr. Keivil.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON

Ah! dear Lady Stutfield! and what has Mr. Kelvil been talking to you about?

LADY STUTFIELD

About Bimetallism, as well as I remember.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Bimetallism! Is that quite a nice subject? However, I know people discuss everything very freely now-a-days. What did Sir John talk to you about, dear Mrs. Allonby?

MRS. ALLONBY

About Patagonia.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Really? What a remote topic! But very improving, I have no doubt.

MRS. ALLONBY

He has been most interesting on the subject of Patagonia. Savages seem to have quite the

same views as cultured people on almost all subjects. They are excessively advanced.

LADY HUNSTANTON

What do they do?

MRS. ALLONBY

Apparently everything.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Well, it is very gratifying, dear Archdeacon, is it not, to find that Human Nature is permanently one.—On the whole, the world is the same world, is it not?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

The world is simply divided into two classes—those who believe the incredible, like the public—and those who do the improbable——

MRS. ALLONBY

Like yourself?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Yes; I am always astonishing myself. It is the only thing that makes life worth living.

LADY STUTFIELD

And what have you been doing lately that astonishes you?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I have been discovering all kinds of beautiful qualities in my own nature.

MRS. ALLONBY

Ah! don't become quite perfect all at once. Do it gradually!

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I don't intend to grow perfect at all. At least, I hope I shan't. It would be most inconvenient. Women love us for our defects. If we have enough of them, they will forgive us everything, even our gigantic intellects.

MRS. ALLONBY

It is premature to ask us to forgive analysis. We forgive adoration; that is quite as much as should be expected from us.

[*Enter Lord Alfred. He joins Lady Stutfield.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON

Ah! we women should forgive everything,

shouldn't we, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot? I am sure you agree with me in that.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I do not, Lady Hunstanton. I think there are many things women should never forgive.

LADY HUNSTANTON

What sort of things?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

The ruin of another woman's life.

[*Moves slowly away to back of stage.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON

Ah! those things are very sad, no doubt, but I believe there are admirable homes where people of that kind are looked after and reformed, and I think on the whole that the secret of life is to take things very, very easily.

MRS. ALLONBY

The secret of life is never to have an emotion that is unbecoming.

LADY STUTFIELD

The secret of life is to appreciate the pleasure of being terribly, terribly deceived.

KELVIL

The secret of life is to resist temptation, Lady Stutfield.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

There is no secret of life. Life's aim, if it has one, is simply to be always looking for temptations. There are not nearly enough. I sometimes pass a whole day without coming across a single one. It is quite dreadful. It makes one so nervous about the future.

LADY HUNSTANTON

[*Shakes her fan at him.*] I don't know how it is, dear Lord Illingworth, but everything you have said to-day seems to me excessively immoral. It has been most interesting, listening to you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

All thought is immoral. Its very essence is destruction. If you think of anything, you kill it. Nothing survives being thought of.

LADY HUNSTANTON

I don't understand a word, Lord Illingworth. But I have no doubt it is all quite true. Person-

ally, I have very little to reproach myself with, on the score of thinking. I don't believe in women thinking too much. Women should think in moderation, as they should do all things in moderation.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Moderation is a fatal thing, Lady Hunstanton. Nothing succeeds like excess.

LADY HUNSTANTON

I hope I shall remember that. It sounds an admirable maxim. But I'm beginning to forget everything. It's a great misfortune.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

It is one of your most fascinating qualities, Lady Hunstanton. No woman should have a memory. Memory in a woman is the beginning of dowdiness. One can always tell from a woman's bonnet whether she has got a memory or not.

LADY HUNSTANTON

How charming you are, dear Lord Illingworth. You always find out that one's most

glaring fault is one's most important virtue. You have the most comforting views of life.

[*Enter Farquhar.*]

FARQUHAR

Doctor Daubeny's carriage!

LADY HUNSTANTON

My dear Archdeacon! It is only half-past ten.

THE ARCHDEACON

[*Rising.*] I am afraid I must go, Lady Hunstanton. Tuesday is always one of Mrs. Daubeny's bad nights.

LADY HUNSTANTON

[*Rising.*] Well, I won't keep you from her. [*Goes with him towards door.*] I have told Farquhar to put a brace of partridges into the carriage. Mrs. Daubeny may fancy them.

THE ARCHDEACON

It is very kind of you, but Mrs. Daubeny never touches solids now. Lives entirely on jellies. But she is wonderfully cheerful, wonderfully cheerful. She has nothing to complain of. [*Exit with Lady Hunstanton.*]

MRS. ALLONBY

[*Goes over to Lord Illingworth.*] There is a beautiful moon to-night.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Let us go and look at it. To look at anything that is inconstant is charming now-a-days.

MRS. ALLONBY

You have your looking-glass.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

It is unkind. It merely shows me my wrinkles.

MRS. ALLONBY

Mine is better behaved. It never tells me the truth.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Then it is in love with you.

[*Exeunt Sir John, Lady Stutfield, Mr. Kelvil, and Lord Alfred.*]

GERALD [*to Lord Illingworth.*]

May I come too?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Do, my dear boy. [*Moves towards door with Mrs. Allonby and Gerald.*]

[*Lady Caroline enters, looks rapidly round and goes out in opposite direction to that taken by Sir John and Lady Stutfield.*]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Gerald!

GERALD

What, mother!

[*Exit Lord Illingworth with Mrs. Allonby.*]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

It is getting late. Let us go home.

GERALD

My dear mother. Do let us wait a little longer. Lord Illingworth is so delightful, and, by the way, mother, I have a great surprise for you. We are starting for India at the end of this month.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Let us go home.

GERALD

If you really want to, of course, mother, but I must bid good-bye to Lord Illingworth first. I'll be back in five minutes. [*Exit.*]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Let him leave me if he chooses, but not with him—not with him! I couldn't bear it. [*Walks up and down.*]

[*Enter Hester.*]

HESTER

What a lovely night it is, Mrs. Arbuthnot.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Is it?

HESTER

Mrs. Arbuthnot, I wish you would let us be friends. You are so different from the other women here. When you came into the drawing-room this evening, somehow you brought with you a sense of what is good and pure in life. I had been foolish. There are things that are right to say, but that may be said at the wrong time and to the wrong people.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I heard what you said. I agree with it, Miss Worsley.

HESTER

I didn't know you had heard it. But I knew you would agree with me. A woman who has sinned should be punished, shouldn't she?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Yes.

HESTER

She shouldn't be allowed to come into the society of good men and women?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

She should not.

HESTER

And the man should be punished in the same way?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

In the same way. And the children, if there are children, in the same way also?

HESTER

Yes, it is right that the sins of the parents

should be visited on the children. It is a just law. It is God's law.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

It is one of God's terrible laws.

[*Moves away to fireplace.*]

HESTER

You are distressed about your son leaving you, Mrs. Arbuthnot?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Yes.

HESTER

Do you like him going away with Lord Illingworth? Of course there is position, no doubt, and money, but position and money are not everything, are they?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

They are nothing; they bring misery.

HESTER

Then why do you let your son go with him?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

He wishes it himself.

HESTER

But if you asked him he would stay, would he not?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

He has set his heart on going.

HESTER

He couldn't refuse you anything. He loves you too much. Ask him to stay. Let me send him in to you. He is on the terrace at this moment with Lord Illingworth. I heard them laughing together as I passed through the Music-room.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Don't trouble, Miss Worsley, I can wait. It is of no consequence.

HESTER

No, I'll tell him you want him. Do—do ask him to stay. [*Exit Hester.*]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

He won't come—I know he won't come.

[*Enter Lady Caroline. She looks round anxiously. Enter Gerald.*]

LADY CAROLINE

Mr. Arbuthnot, may I ask you is Sir John anywhere on the terrace?

GERALD

No, Lady Caroline, he is not on the terrace.

LADY CAROLINE

It is very curious. It is time for him to retire. [*Exit Lady Caroline.*]

GERALD

Dear mother, I am afraid I kept you waiting. I forgot all about it. I am so happy to-night, mother; I have never been so happy.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

At the prospect of going away?

GERALD

Don't put it like that, mother. Of course I am sorry to leave you. Why, you are the best mother in the whole world. But after all, as Lord Illingworth says, it is impossible to live in such a place as Wrockley. You don't mind it. But I'm ambitious; I want something more than that. I want to have a career. I want to do

something that will make you proud of me, and Lord Illingworth is going to help me. He is going to do everything for me.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Gerald, don't go away with Lord Illingworth. I implore you not to. Gerald, I beg you!

GERALD

Mother, how changeable you are! You don't seem to know your own mind for a single moment. An hour and a half ago in the Drawing-room you agreed to the whole thing; now you turn round and make objections, and try to force me to give up my one chance in life. Yes, my one chance. You don't suppose that men like Lord Illingworth are to be found every day, do you, mother? It is very strange that when I have had such a wonderful piece of good luck, the one person to put difficulties in my way should be my own mother. Besides, you know, mother, I love Hester Worsley. Who could help loving her? I love her more than I have ever told you, far more. And if I had a position, if I had prospects, I could—I could ask her to—Don't you understand now, mother, what it means to me to be Lord Illingworth's secretary?

To start like that is to find a career ready for one—before one—waiting for one. If I were Lord Illingworth's secretary I could ask Hester to be my wife. As a wretched bank clerk with a hundred a year it would be an impertinence.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I fear you need have no hopes of Miss Worsley. I know her views on life. She has just told them to me. [*A pause.*]

GERALD

Then I have my ambition left, at any rate. That is something—I am glad I have that! You have always tried to crush my ambition, mother—haven't you? You have told me that the world is a wicked place, that success is not worth having, that society is shallow, and all that sort of thing—well, I don't believe it, mother. I think the world must be delightful. I think society must be exquisite. I think success is a thing worth having. You have been wrong in all that you taught me, mother, quite wrong. Lord Illingworth is a successful man. He is a fashionable man. He is a man who lives in the world and for it. Well, I would give anything to be just like Lord Illingworth.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I would sooner see you dead.

GERALD

Mother, what is your objection to Lord Illingworth? Tell me—tell me right out. What is it?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

He is a bad man.

GERALD

In what way bad? I don't understand what you mean.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I will tell you.

GERALD

I suppose you think him bad because he doesn't believe the same things as you do. Well, men are different from women, mother. It is natural that they should have different views.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

It is not what Lord Illingworth believes, or what he does not believe, that makes him bad. It is what he is.

GERALD

Mother, is it something you know of him? Something you actually know?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

It is something I know.

GERALD

Something you are quite sure of?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Quite sure of.

GERALD

How long have you known it?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

For twenty years.

GERALD

Is it fair to go back twenty years in any man's career? And what have you or I to do with Lord Illingworth's early life? What business is it of ours?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

What this man has been, he is now, and will be always.

GERALD

Mother, tell me what Lord Illingworth did? If he did anything shameful, I will not go away with him. Surely you know me well enough for that?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Gerald, come near to me. Quite close to me, as you used to do when you were a little boy, when you were your mother's own boy. [*Gerald sits down beside his mother. She runs her fingers through his hair, and strokes his hands.*] Gerald, there was a girl once, she was very young, she was a little over eighteen at the time. George Harford—that was Lord Illingworth's name then—George Harford met her. She knew nothing about life. He—knew everything. He made this girl love him. He made her love him so much that she left her father's house with him one morning. She loved him so much, and he had promised to marry her! He had solemnly promised to marry her, and she had believed him. She was very young, and—and ignorant of what life really is. But he put the marriage off from week to week, and month to month.—She trusted in him all the while. She

loved him.—Before her child was born—for she had a child—she implored him for the child's sake to marry her, that the child might have a name, that her sin might not be visited on the child, who was innocent. He refused. After the child was born she left him, taking the child away, and her life was ruined, and her soul ruined, and all that was sweet, and good, and pure in her ruined also. She suffered terribly —she suffers now. She will always suffer. For her there is no joy, no peace, no atonement. She is a woman who drags a chain like a guilty thing. She is a woman who wears a mask, like a thing that is a leper. The fire cannot purify her. The waters cannot quench her anguish. Nothing can heal her! no anodyne can give her sleep! no poppies forgetfulness! She is lost! She is a lost soul!—That is why I call Lord Illingworth a bad man. That is why I don't want my boy to be with him.

GERALD

My dear mother, it all sounds very tragic, of course. But I dare say the girl was just as much to blame as Lord Illingworth was.—After all, would a really nice girl, a girl with any

nice feelings at all, go away from her home with a man to whom she was not married, and live with him as his wife? No nice girl would.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

[*After a pause.*] Gerald, I withdraw all my objections. You are at liberty to go away with Lord Illingworth, when and where you choose.

GERALD

Dear mother, I knew you wouldn't stand in my way. You are the best woman God ever made. And, as for Lord Illingworth, I don't believe he is capable of anything infamous or base. I can't believe it of him—I can't.

HESTER

[*Outside.*] Let me go! Let me go!

[*Enter Hester in terror, and rushes over to Gerald and flings herself in his arms.*]

HESTER

Oh! save me—save me from him!

GERALD

From whom?

HESTER

He has insulted me! Horribly insulted me! Save me!

GERALD

Who? Who has dared——?

[*Lord Illingworth enters at back of stage. Hester breaks from Gerald's arms and points to him.*]

GERALD [*He is quite beside himself with rage and indignation.*]

Lord Illingworth, you have insulted the purest thing on God's earth, a thing as pure as my own mother. You have insulted the woman I love most in the world with my own mother. As there is a God in heaven, I will kill you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

[*Rushing across and catching hold of him.*] No! no!

GERALD

[*Thrusting her back.*] Don't hold me, mother. Don't hold me—I'll kill him!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Gerald!

GERALD

Let me go, I say!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Stop, Gerald, stop! He is your own father!

[*Gerald clutches his mother's hand and looks into her face. She sinks slowly on the ground in shame. Hester steals towards the door. Lord Illingworth frowns and bites his lip. After a time Gerald raises his mother up, puts his arm around her, and leads her from the room.*]

ACT-DROP.

FOURTH ACT.

SCENE—*Sitting-room at Mrs. Arbuthnot's. Large open French window at back, looking on to garden. Doors R.C. and L.C.*

[*Gerald Arbuthnot writing at table.*]

[*Enter Alice R.C. followed by Lady Hunstanton and Mrs. Allonby.*]

ALICE

Lady Hunstanton and Mrs. Allonby

[*Exit L.C.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON

Good morning, Gerald.

GERALD

[*Rising.*] Good morning, Lady Hunstanton. Good morning, Mrs. Allonby.

LADY HUNSTANTON

[*Sitting down.*] We came to inquire for your dear mother, Gerald. I hope she is better?

GERALD

My mother has not come down yet, Lady Hunstanton.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Ah, I am afraid the heat was too much for her last night. I think there must have been thunder in the air. Or perhaps it was the music. Music makes one feel so romantic—at least it always gets on one's nerves.

MRS. ALLONBY

It's the same thing, now-a-days.

LADY HUNSTANTON

I am so glad I don't know what you mean, dear. I am afraid you mean something wrong. Ah, I see you're examining Mrs. Arbuthnot's pretty room. Isn't it nice and old-fashioned?

MRS. ALLONBY

[*Surveying the room through her lorgnette.*] It looks quite the happy English home.

LADY HUNSTANTON

That's just the word, dear; that just describes

it. One feels your mother's good influence in everything she has about her, Gerald.

MRS. ALLONBY

Lord Illingworth says that all influence is bad, but that a good influence is the worst in the world.

LADY HUNSTANTON

When Lord Illingworth knows Mrs. Arbuthnot better, he will change his mind. I must certainly bring him here.

MRS. ALLONBY

I should like to see Lord Illingworth in a happy English home.

LADY HUNSTANTON

It would do him a great deal of good, dear. Most women in London, now-a-days, seem to furnish their rooms with nothing but orchids, foreigners, and French novels. But here we have the room of a sweet saint. Fresh natural flowers, books that don't shock one, pictures that one can look at without blushing.

MRS. ALLONBY

But I like blushing.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Well, there *is* a good deal to be said for blushing, if one can do it at the proper moment. Poor dear Hunstanton used to tell me I didn't blush nearly often enough. But then he was so very particular. He wouldn't let me know any of his men friends, except those who were over seventy, like poor Lord Ashton: who afterwards, by the way, was brought into the Divorce Court. A most unfortunate case.

MRS. ALLONBY

I delight in men over seventy. They always offer one the devotion of a lifetime. I think seventy an ideal age for a man.

LADY HUNSTANTON

She is quite incorrigible, Gerald, isn't she? By-the-by, Gerald, I hope your dear mother will come and see me more often now. You and Lord Illingworth start almost immediately, don't you?

GERALD

I have given up my intention of being Lord Illingworth's secretary.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Surely not, Gerald! It would be most unwise of you. What reason can you have?

GERALD

I don't think I should be suitable for the post.

MRS. ALLONBY

I wish Lord Illingworth would ask me to be his secretary. But he says I am not serious enough.

LADY HUNSTANTON

My dear, you really mustn't talk like that in this house. Mrs. Arbuthnot doesn't know anything about the wicked society in which we all live. She won't go into it. She is far too good. I consider it was a great honour her coming to me last night. It gave quite an atmosphere of respectability to the party.

MRS. ALLONBY

Ah, that must have been what you thought was thunder in the air.

LADY HUNSTANTON

My dear, how can you say that? There is no

resemblance between the two things at all. But really, Gerald, what do you mean by not being suitable?

GERALD

Lord Illingworth's views of life and mine are too different.

LADY HUNSTANTON

But, my dear Gerald, at your age you shouldn't have any views of life. They are quite out of place. You must be guided by others in this matter. Lord Illingworth has made you the most flattering offer, and travelling with him you would see the world—as much of it, at least, as one should look at—under the best auspices possible, and stay with all the right people, which is so important at this solemn moment in your career.

GERALD

I don't want to see the world; I've seen enough of it.

MRS. ALLONBY

I hope you don't think you have exhausted life, Mr. Arbuthnot. When a man says that one knows that life has exhausted him.

GERALD

I don't wish to leave my mother.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Now, Gerald, that is pure laziness on your part. Not leave your mother! If I were your mother I would insist on your going.

[*Enter Alice L.C.*]

ALICE

Mrs. Arbuthnot's compliments, my lady, but she has a bad headache, and cannot see any one this morning. [*Exit R.C.*.]

LADY HUNSTANTON

[*Rising.*] A bad headache! I am so sorry! Perhaps you'll bring her up to Hunstanton this afternoon, if she is better, Gerald.

GERALD

I am afraid not this afternoon, Lady Hunstanton.

LADY HUNSTANTON

Well, to-morrow, then. Ah, if you had a father, Gerald, he wouldn't let you waste your life here. He would send you off with Lord

Illingworth at once. But mothers are so weak. They give up to their sons in everything. We are all heart, all heart. Come dear, I must call at the rectory and inquire for Mrs. Daubeny, who, I am afraid, is far from well. It is wonderful how the Archdeacon bears up, quite wonderful. He is the most sympathetic of husbands. Quite a model. Good-bye, Gerald, give my fondest love to your mother.

MRS. ALLONBY

Good-bye, Mr. Arbuthnot.

GERALD

Good-bye.

[*Exit Lady Hunstanton and Mrs. Allonby. Gerald sits down and reads over his letter.*]

GERALD

What name can I sign? I, who have no right to any name. [*Signs name, puts letter into envelope, addresses it, and is about to seal it, when Door L.C. opens and Mrs. Arbuthnot enters. Gerald lays down sealing-wax. Mother and son look at each other.*]

LADY HUNSTANTON

[*Through French window at the back.*] Good-bye again, Gerald. We are taking the short cut across your pretty garden. Now, remember my advice to you—start at once with Lord Illingworth.

MRS. ALLONBY

Au revoir, Mr. Arbuthnot. Mind you bring me back something nice from your travels—not an Indian shawl—on no account an Indian shawl. [*Exeunt.*]

GERALD

Mother, I have just written to him.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

To whom?

GERALD

To my father. I have written to tell him to come here at four o'clock this afternoon.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

He shall not come here. He shall not cross the threshold of my house.

GERALD

He must come.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Gerald, if you are going away with Lord Illingworth, go at once. Go before it kills me; but don't ask me to meet him.

GERALD

Mother, you don't understand. Nothing in the world would induce me to go away with Lord Illingworth, or to leave you. Surely you know me well enough for that. No; I have written to him to say——

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

What can you have to say to him?

GERALD

Can't you guess, mother, what I have written in this letter?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

No.

GERALD

Mother, surely you can. Think, think what

must be done, now, at once, within the next few days.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

There is nothing to be done.

GERALD

I have written to Lord Illingworth to tell him that he must marry you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Marry me?

GERALD

Mother, I will force him to do it. The wrong that has been done you must be repaired. Atonement must be made. Justice may be slow, mother, but it comes in the end. In a few days you shall be Lord Illingworth's lawful wife.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

But, Gerald——

GERALD

I will insist upon his doing it. I will make him do it; he will not dare to refuse.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

But, Gerald, it is I who refuse. I will not marry Lord Illingworth.

GERALD

Not marry him? Mother!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I will not marry him.

GERALD

But you don't understand; it is for your sake I am talking, not for mine. This marriage, this necessary marriage, this marriage, that, for obvious reasons, must inevitably take place, will not help me, will not give me a name that will be really, rightly mine to bear. But surely it will be something for you, that you, my mother, should, however late, become the wife of the man who is my father. Will not that be something?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I will not marry him.

GERALD

Mother, you must.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I will not. You talk of atonement for a wrong done. What atonement can be made to me? There is no atonement possible. I am

disgraced: he is not. That is all. It is the usual history of a man and a woman as it usually happens, as it always happens. And the ending is the ordinary ending. The woman suffers. The man goes free.

GERALD

I don't know if that is the ordinary ending, mother: I hope it is not. But your life, at any rate, shall not end like that. The man shall make whatever reparation is possible. It is not enough. It does not wipe out the past, I know that. But at least it makes the future better, better for you, mother.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I refuse to marry Lord Illingworth.

GERALD

If he came to you himself and asked you to be his wife you would give him a different answer. Remember, he is my father.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

If he came himself, which he will not do, my answer would be the same. Remember I am your mother.

GERALD

Mother, you make it terribly difficult for me by talking like that, and I can't understand why you won't look at this matter from the right, from the only proper standpoint. It is to take away the bitterness out of your life, to take away the shadow that lies on your name, that this marriage must take place. There is no alternative: and after the marriage you and I can go away together. But the marriage must take place first. It is a duty that you owe, not merely to yourself, but to all other women—yes: to all the other women in the world, lest he betray more.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I owe nothing to other women. There is not one of them to help me. There is not one woman in the world to whom I could go for pity, if I would take it, or for sympathy, if I could win it. Women are hard on each other. That girl, last night, good though she is, fled from the room as though I were a tainted thing. She was right. I am a tainted thing. But my wrongs are my own, and I will bear them alone. I must bear them alone. What have women who

have not sinned to do with me, or I with them? We do not understand each other.

[*Enter Hester behind.*]

GERALD

I implore you to do what I ask you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

What son has ever asked of his mother to make so hideous a sacrifice? None.

GERALD

What mother has ever refused to marry the father of her own child? None.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Let me be the first, then. I will not do it.

GERALD

Mother, you believe in religion, and you brought me up to believe in it also. Well, surely your religion, the religion that you taught me when I was a boy, mother, must tell you that I am right. You know it, you feel it.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I do not know it. I do not feel it, nor will I ever stand before God's altar and ask God's

blessing on so hideous a mockery as a marriage between me and George Harford. I will not say the words the Church bids us to say. I will not say them. I dare not. How could I swear to love the man I loathe, to honour him who wrought you dishonour, to obey him who, in his mastery, made me to sin? No; marriage is a sacrament for those who love each other. It is not for such as him, or such as me. Gerald, to save you from the world's sneers and taunts I have lied to the world. For twenty years I have lied to the world. I could not tell the world the truth. Who can, ever? But not for my own sake will I lie to God, and in God's presence. No, Gerald, no ceremony, Church-hallowed or State-made, shall ever bind me to George Harford. It may be that I am too bound to him already, who, robbing me, yet left me richer, so that in the mire of my life, I found the pearl of price, or what I thought would be so.

GERALD

I don't understand you now.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Men don't understand what mothers are. I

am no different from other women except in the wrong done me and the wrong I did, and my very heavy punishments and great disgrace. And yet, to bear you I had to look on death. To nurture you I had to wrestle with it. Death fought with me for you. All women have to fight with death to keep their children. Death, being childless, wants our children from us. Gerald, when you were naked I clothed you, when you were hungry I gave you food. Night and day all that long winter I tended you. No office is too mean, no care too lowly for the thing we women love—and oh! how *I* loved *you*. Not Hannah Samuel more. And you needed love, for you were weakly, and only love could have kept you alive. Only love can keep any one alive. And boys are careless often and without thinking give pain, and we always fancy that when they come to man's estate and know us better, they will repay us. But it is not so. The world draws them from our side, and they make friends with whom they are happier than they are with us, and have amusements from which we are barred, and interests that are not ours: and they are unjust to us often, for when they find life bitter they blame us for it, and

when they find it sweet we do not taste its sweetness with them. . . . You made many friends and went into their houses and were glad with them, and I, knowing my secret, did not dare to follow, but stayed at home and closed the door, shut out the sun and sat in darkness. What should I have done in honest households? My past was ever with me. . . . And you thought I didn't care for the pleasant things of life. I tell you I longed for them, but did not dare to touch them, feeling I had no right. You thought I was happier working amongst the poor. That was my mission, you imagined. It was not, but where else was I to go? The sick do not ask if the hand that smooths their pillow is pure, nor the dying care if the lips that touch their brow have known the kiss of sin. It was you I thought of all the time; I gave to them the love you did not need: lavished on them a love that was not theirs. . . . And you thought I spent too much of my time going to Church, and in Church duties. But where else could I turn? God's house is the only house where sinners are made welcome, and you were always in my heart, Gerald, too much in my heart. For, though day after day,

at morn or evensong, I have knelt in God's house, I have never repented of my sin. How could I repent of my sin when you, my love, were its fruit! Even now that you are bitter to me I cannot repent. I do not. You are more to me than innocence. I would rather be your mother—oh! much rather!—than have been always pure. . . . Oh, don't you see? don't you understand? It is my dishonour that has made you so dear to me. It is my disgrace that has bound you so closely to me. It is the price I paid for you—the price of soul and body—that makes me love you as I do. Oh, don't ask me to do this horrible thing. Child of my shame, be still the child of my shame!

GERALD

Mother, I didn't know you loved me so much as that. And I will be a better son to you than I have been. And you and I must never leave each other . . . but, mother . . . I can't help it . . . you must become my father's wife. You must marry him. It is your duty.

HESTER

[*Running forward and embracing Mrs. Arbuthnot.*] No, no; you shall not. That would

be real dishonour, the first you have ever known. That would be real disgrace: the first to touch you. Leave him and come with me. There are other countries than England. . . . Oh! other countries over sea, better, wiser, and less unjust lands. The world is very wide and very big.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

No, not for me. For me the world is shrivelled to a palm's breadth, and where I walk there are thorns.

HESTER

It shall not be so. We shall somewhere find green valleys and fresh waters, and if we weep, well, we shall weep together. Have we not both loved him?

GERALD

Hester!

HESTER

[*Waving him back.*] Don't, don't! You cannot love me at all, unless you love her also. You cannot honour me, unless she's holier to you. In her all womanhood is martyred. Not

she alone, but all of us are stricken in her house.

GERALD

Hester, Hester, what shall I do?

HESTER

Do you respect the man who is your father?

GERALD

Respect him? I despise him! He is infamous!

HESTER

I thank you for saving me from him last night.

GERALD

Ah, that is nothing. I would die to save you. But you don't tell me what to do now!

HESTER

Have I not thanked you for saving *me?*

GERALD

But what should I do?

HESTER

Ask your own heart, not mine. I never had a mother to save, or shame.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

He is hard—he is hard. Let me go away.

GERALD

[*Rushes over and kneels down beside his mother.*] Mother, forgive me: I have been to blame.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Don't kiss my hands: they are cold. My heart is cold: something has broken it.

HESTER

Ah, don't say that. Hearts live by being wounded. Pleasure may turn a heart to stone, riches may make it callous, but sorrow—oh, sorrow cannot break it. Besides, what sorrows have you now? Why, at this moment you are more dear to him than ever, *dear* though you have *been*, and oh! how dear you *have* been always. Ah! be kind to him.

GERALD

You are my mother and my father all in one. I need no second parent. It was for you I spoke, for you alone. Oh, say something, mother. Have I but found one love to lose an-

other? Don't tell me that. O mother, you are cruel. [*Gets up and flings himself sobbing on a sofa.*]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

[*To Hester.*] But has he found indeed another love?

HESTER

You know I have loved him always.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

But we are very poor.

HESTER

Who, being loved, is poor? Oh, no one. I hate my riches. They are a burden. Let him share it with me.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

But we are disgraced. We rank among the outcasts. Gerald is nameless. The sins of the parents should be visited on the children. It is God's law.

HESTER

I was wrong. God's law is only Love.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

[*Rises, and taking Hester by the hand, goes slowly over to where Gerald is lying on the sofa with his head buried in his hands. She touches him and he looks up.*] Gerald, I cannot give you a father, but I have brought you a wife.

GERALD

Mother, I am not worthy either of her or you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

So she comes first, you are worthy. And when you are away, Gerald . . . with . . . her—oh, think of me sometimes. Don't forget me. And when you pray, pray for me. We should pray when we are happiest, and you will be happy, Gerald.

HESTER

Oh, you don't think of leaving us?

GERALD

Mother, you won't leave us?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I might bring shame upon you!

GERALD

Mother!

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

For a little then: and if you let me, near you always.

HESTER

[*To Mrs. Arbuthnot.*] Come out with us to the garden.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Later on, later on.

[*Exeunt Hester and Gerald.*]

[*Mrs. Arbuthnot goes toward door L.C. Stops at looking-glass over mantelpiece and looks into it.*]

[*Enter Alice R.C.*]

ALICE

A gentleman to see you, ma'am.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Say I am not at home. Show me the card. [*Takes card from salver and looks at it.*] Say I will not see him.

[*Lord Illingworth enters. Mrs. Arbuthnot*

sees him in the glass and starts, but does not turn round. Exit Alice.]

What can you have to say to me to-day, George Harford? You can have nothing to say to me. You must leave this house.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Rachel, Gerald knows everything about you and me now, so some arrangement must be come to that will suit us all three. I assure you, he will find in me the most charming and generous of fathers.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

My son may come in at any moment. I saved you last night. I may not be able to save you again. My son feels my dishonour strongly, terribly strongly. I beg you to go.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

[*Sitting down.*] Last night was excessively unfortunate. That silly Puritan girl making a scene merely because I wanted to kiss her. What harm is there in a kiss?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

[*Turning round.*] A kiss may ruin a human

life, George Harford. *I* know that. *I* know that too well.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

We won't discuss that at present. What is of importance to-day, as yesterday, is still our son. I am extremely fond of him, as you know, and odd though it may seem to you, I admired his conduct last night immensely. He took up the cudgels for that pretty prude with wonderful promptitude. He is just what I should have liked a son of mine to be. Except that no son of mine should ever take the side of the Puritans: that is always an error. Now, what I propose is this.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Lord Illingworth, no proposition of yours interests me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

According to our ridiculous English laws, I can't legitimise Gerald. But I can leave him my property. Illingworth is entailed, of course, but it is a tedious barrack of a place. He can have Ashby, which is much prettier, Harborough, which has the best shooting in the north

of England, and the house in St. James Square. What more can a gentleman desire in this world?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Nothing more, I am quite sure.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

As for a title, a title is really rather a nuisance in these democratic days. As George Harford I had everything I wanted. Now I have merely everything that other people want, which isn't nearly so pleasant. Well, my proposal is this.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I told you I was not interested, and I beg you to go.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

The boy is to be with you for six months in the year, and with me for the other six. That is perfectly fair, is it not? You can have whatever allowance you like, and live where you choose. As for your past, no one knows anything about it except myself and Gerald. There is the Puritan, of course, the Puritan in white

muslin, but she doesn't count. She couldn't tell the story without explaining that she objected to being kissed, could she? And all the women would think her a fool and the men think her a bore. And you need not be afraid that Gerald won't be my heir. I needn't tell you I have not the slightest intention of marrying.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

You come too late. My son has no need of you. You are not necessary.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

What do you mean, Rachel?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

That you are not necessary to Gerald's career. He does not require you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I do not understand you.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Look into the garden. [*Lord Illingworth rises and goes towards window.*] You had better not let them see you: you bring unpleasant memories. [*Lord Illingworth looks out and*

starts.] She loves him. They love each other. We are safe from you, and we are going away.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Where?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

We will not tell you, and if you find us we will not know you. You seem surprised. What welcome would you get from the girl whose lips you tried to soil, from the boy whose life you have shamed, from the mother whose dishonour comes from you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

You have grown hard, Rachel.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I was too weak once. It is well for me that I have changed.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I was very young at the time. We men know life too early.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

And we women know life too late. That is the difference between men and women. [*A pause.*]

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Rachel, I want my son. My money may be of no use to him now. I may be of no use to him, but I want my son. Bring us together, Rachel. You can do it if you choose. [*Sees letter on table.*]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

There is no room in my boy's life for *you*. He is not interested in *you*.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Then why does he write to me?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

What do you mean?

LORD ILLINGWORTH

What letter is this? [*Takes up letter.*]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

That—is nothing. Give it to me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

It is addressed to *me*.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

You are not to open it. I forbid you to open it.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

And in Gerald's handwriting.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

It was not to have been sent. It is a letter he wrote to you this morning before he saw me. But he is sorry now he wrote it, very sorry. You are not to open it. Give it to me.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

It belongs to me. [*Opens it, sits down and reads it slowly. Mrs. Arbuthnot watches him all the time.*] You have read this letter, I suppose, Rachel?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

No.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

You know what is in it?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Yes!

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I don't admit for a moment that the boy is right in what he says. I don't admit it is any duty of mine to marry you. I deny it entirely.

But to get my son back I am ready—yes, I am ready to marry you, Rachel—and to treat you always with the deference and respect due to my wife. I will marry you as soon as you choose. I give you my word of honour.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

You made that promise to me once before and broke it.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I will keep it now. And that will show you that I love my son, at least as much as you love him. For when I marry you, Rachel, there are some ambitions I shall have to surrender. High ambitions too, if any ambition is high.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I decline to marry you, Lord Illingworth.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Are you serious?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Yes.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Do tell me your reasons. They would interest me enormously.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

I have already explained them to my son.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I suppose they were intensely sentimental, weren't they? You women live by your emotions and for them. You have no philosophy of life.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

You are right. We women live by our emotions and for them. By our passions, and for them, if you will. I have two passions, Lord Illingworth: my love of him, my hate of you. You cannot kill those. They feed each other.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

What sort of love is that which needs to have hate as its brother?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

It is the sort of love I have for Gerald. Do you think that terrible? Well, it is terrible. All love is terrible. All love is a tragedy. I loved you once, Lord Illingworth. Oh, what a tragedy for a woman to have loved you!

LORD ILLINGWORTH

So you really refuse to marry me?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Yes.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

Because you hate me?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Yes.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

And does my son hate me as you do?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

No.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

I am glad of that, Rachel.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

He merely despises you.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

What a pity! What a pity for him, I mean.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Don't be deceived, George. Children begin

by loving their parents. After a time they judge them. Rarely if ever do they forgive them.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

[*Reads letter over again, very slowly.*] May I ask by what arguments you made the boy who wrote this letter, this beautiful, passionate letter, believe that you should not marry his father, the father of your own child.

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

It was not I who made him see it. It was another.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

What *fin-de-siècle* person?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

The Puritan, Lord Illingworth. [*A pause.*]

LORD ILLINGWORTH

[*Winces, then rises slowly and goes over to table where his hat and gloves are. Mrs. Arbuthnot is standing close to the table. He picks up one of the gloves and begins putting it on.*] There is not much then for me to do here, Rachel?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

Nothing.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

It is good-bye, is it?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

For ever, I hope, this time, Lord Illingworth.

LORD ILLINGWORTH

How curious! At this moment you look exactly as you looked the night you left me twenty years ago. You have just the same expression in your mouth. Upon my word, Rachel, no woman ever loved me as you did. Why, you gave yourself to me like a flower, to do anything I liked with. You were the prettiest of playthings, the most fascinating of small romances. . . . [*Pulls out watch.*] Quarter to two! Must be strolling back to Hunstanton. Don't suppose I shall see you there again. I'm sorry, I am, really. It's been an amusing experience to have met amongst people of one's own rank, and treated quite seriously too, one's mistress and one's——

[*Mrs. Arbuthnot snatches up glove and strikes*

Lord Illingworth across the face with it. Lord Illingworth starts. He is dazed by the insult of his punishment. Then he controls himself, and goes to window and looks out at his son. Sighs, and leaves the room.]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

[*Falls sobbing on the sofa.*] He would have said it. He would have said it.

[*Enter Gerald and Hester from the garden.*]

GERALD

Well, dear mother. You never came out after all. So we have come in to fetch you. Mother, you have not been crying? [*Kneels down beside her.*]

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

My boy! My boy! My boy! [*Running her fingers through his hair.*]

HESTER

[*Coming over.*] But you have two children now. You'll let me be your daughter?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

[*Looking up.*] Would you choose me for a mother?

HESTER

You of all women I have ever known.

[*They move towards the door leading into garden with their arms round each other's waists. Gerald goes to table L.C. for his hat. On turning round he sees Lord Illingworth's glove lying on the floor, and picks it up.*]

GERALD

Hallo, mother, whose glove is this? You have had a visitor. Who was it?

MRS. ARBUTHNOT

[*Turning round.*] Oh! no one. No one in particular. A man of no importance.

CURTAIN.

PART V

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY.

JOHN WORTHING, J. P.
ALGERNON MONCRIEFF
REV. CANON CHASUBLE, D. D.
MERRIMAN, Butler
LANE, Manservant

LADY BRACKNELL
HON. GWENDOLEN FAIRFAX
CECILY CARDEW
MISS PRISM, Governess

THE SCENES OF THE PLAY.

ACT I *Algernon Moncrieff's Flat in Half-Moon Street, W.*

ACT II *The Garden at the Manor House, Woolton.*

ACT III *Drawing-Room at the Manor House, Woolton.*

Time

The Present.

FIRST ACT.

SCENE—*Morning-room in Algernon's flat in Half-Moon Street. The room is luxuriously and artistically furnished. The sound of a piano is heard in the adjoining room.*

[*Lane is arranging afternoon tea on the table, and after the music has ceased, Algernon enters.*]

ALGERNON

Did you hear what I was playing, Lane?

LANE

I didn't think it polite to listen, sir.

ALGERNON

I'm sorry for that, for your sake. I don't play accurately—anyone can play accurately—but I play with wonderful expression. As far as the piano is concerned, sentiment is my forte. I keep science for Life.

LANE

Yes, sir.

ALGERNON

And, speaking of the science of Life, have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Bracknell?

LANE

Yes, sir. [*Hands them on a salver.*]

ALGERNON

[*Inspects them, takes two, and sits down on the sofa.*] Oh! . . . by the way, Lane, I see from your book that on Thursday night, when Lord Shoreman and Mr. Worthing were dining with me, eight bottles of champagne are entered as having been consumed.

LANE

Yes, sir; eight bottles and a pint.

ALGERNON

Why is it that at a bachelor's establishment the servants invariably drink the champagne? I ask merely for information.

LANE

I attribute it to the superior quality of the wine, sir. I have often observed that in married households the champagne is rarely of a first-rate brand.

ALGERNON

Good Heavens! Is marriage so demoralising as that?

LANE

I believe it *is* a very pleasant state, sir. I have had very little experience of it myself up to the present. I have only been married once. That was in consequence of a misunderstanding between myself and a young person.

ALGERNON

[*Languidly.*] I don't know that I am much interested in your family life, Lane.

LANE

No, sir; it is not a very interesting subject. I never think of it myself.

ALGERNON

Very natural, I am sure. That will do, Lane, thank you.

LANE

Thank you, sir. [*Lane goes out.*]

ALGERNON

Lane's views on marriage seem somewhat lax. Really, if the lower orders don't set us a good example, what on earth is the use of them? They seem, as a class, to have absolutely no sense of moral responsibility.

[*Enter Lane.*]

LANE

Mr. Ernest Worthing.

[*Enter Jack.*] [*Lane goes out.*]

ALGERNON

How are you, my dear Ernest? What brings you up to town?

JACK

Oh, pleasure, pleasure! What else should bring one anywhere? Eating as usual, I see, Algy!

ALGERNON

[*Stiffly.*] I believe it is customary in good society to take some slight refreshment at five

o'clock. Where have you been since last Thursday?

JACK

[*Sitting down on the sofa.*] In the country.

ALGERNON

What on earth do you do there?

JACK

[*Pulling off his gloves.*] When one is in town one amuses oneself. When one is in the country one amuses other people. It is excessively boring.

ALGERNON

And who are the people you amuse?

JACK

[*Airily.*] Oh, neighbours, neighbours.

ALGERNON

Got nice neighbours in your part of Shropshire?

JACK

Perfectly horrid! Never speak to one of them.

ALGERNON

How immensely you must amuse them! [*Goes over and takes sandwich.*] By the way, Shropshire is your county, is it not?

JACK

Eh? Shropshire? Yes, of course. Hallo! Why all these cups? Why cucumber sandwiches? Why such reckless extravagance in one so young? Who is coming to tea?

ALGERNON

Oh! merely Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen.

JACK

How perfectly delightful!

ALGERNON

Yes, that is all very well; but I am afraid Aunt Augusta won't quite approve of your being here.

JACK

May I ask why?

ALGERNON

My dear fellow, the way you flirt with Gwen-

dolen is perfectly disgraceful. It is almost as bad as the way Gwendolen flirts with you.

JACK

I am in love with Gwendolen. I have come up to town expressly to propose to her.

ALGERNON

I thought you had come up for pleasure? . . . I call that business.

JACK

How utterly unromantic you are!

ALGERNON

I really don't see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal. Why, one may be accepted. One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement is all over. The very essence of romance is uncertainty. If ever I get married, I'll certainly try to forget the fact.

JACK

I have no doubt about that, dear Algy. The Divorce Court was specially invented for people whose memories are so curiously constituted.

ALGERNON

Oh! there is no use speculating on that subject. Divorces are made in Heaven—— [*Jack puts out his hand to take a sandwich. Algernon at once interferes.*] Please don't touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered specially for Aunt Augusta. [*Takes one and eats it.*]

JACK

Well, you have been eating them all the time.

ALGERNON

That is quite a different matter. She is my aunt. [*Takes plate from below.*] Have some bread and butter. The bread and butter is for Gwendolen. Gwendolen is devoted to bread and butter.

JACK

[*Advancing to table and helping himself.*] And very good bread and butter it is too.

ALGERNON

Well, my dear fellow, you need not eat as if you were going to eat it all. You behave as if you were married to her already. You are not

married to her already, and I don't think you ever will be.

JACK

Why on earth do you say that?

ALGERNON

Well, in the first place girls never marry the men they flirt with. Girls don't think it right.

JACK

Oh, that is nonsense!

ALGERNON

It isn't. It is a great truth. It accounts for the extraordinary number of bachelors that one sees all over the place. In the second place, I don't give my consent.

JACK

Your consent!

ALGERNON

My dear fellow, Gwendolen is my first cousin. And before I allow you to marry her, you will have to clear up the whole question of Cecily. [*Rings bell.*]

JACK

Cecily! What on earth do you mean? What do you mean, Algy, by Cecily? I don't know anyone of the name of Cecily.

[*Enter Lane.*]

ALGERNON

Bring me that cigarette case Mr. Worthing left in the smoking-room the last time he dined here.

LANE

Yes, sir. [*Lane goes out.*]

JACK

Do you mean to say you have had my cigarette case all this time? I wish to goodness you had let me know. I have been writing frantic letters to Scotland Yard about it. I was very nearly offering a large reward.

ALGERNON

Well, I wish you would offer one. I happen to be more than usually hard up.

JACK

There is no good offering a large reward now that the thing is found.

[*Enter Lane with the cigarette case on a salver. Algernon takes it at once. Lane goes out.*]

ALGERNON

I think that is rather mean of you, Ernest, I must say. [*Opens case and examines it.*] However, it makes no matter, for, now that I look at the inscription inside, I find that the thing isn't yours after all.

JACK

Of course it's mine. [*Moving to him.*] You have seen me with it a hundred times, and you have no right whatsoever to read what is written inside. It is a very ungentlemanly thing to read a private cigarette case.

ALGERNON

Oh! it is absurd to have a hard-and-fast rule about what one should read and what one shouldn't. More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn't read.

JACK

I am quite aware of the fact, and I don't propose to discuss modern culture. It isn't the sort

of thing one should talk of in private. I simply want my cigarette case back.

ALGERNON

Yes; but this isn't your cigarette case. This cigarette case is a present from someone of the name of Cecily, and you said you didn't know anyone of that name.

JACK

Well, if you want to know, Cecily happens to be my aunt.

ALGERNON

Your aunt!

JACK

Yes. Charming old lady she is, too. Lives at Tunbridge Wells. Just give it back to me, Algy.

ALGERNON

[*Retreating to back of sofa.*] But why does she call herself Cecily if she is your aunt and lives at Tunbridge Wells? [*Reading.*] "From little Cecily with her fondest love."

JACK

[*Moving to sofa and kneeling upon it.*] My dear fellow, what on earth is there in that?

Some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall. That is a matter that surely an aunt may be allowed to decide for herself. You seem to think that every aunt should be exactly like your aunt! That is absurd! For Heaven's sake give me back my cigarette case. [*Follows Algy round the room.*]

ALGERNON

Yes. But why does your aunt call you her uncle? "From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack." There is no objection, I admit, to an aunt being a small aunt, but why an aunt, no matter what her size may be, should call her own nephew her uncle, I can't quite make out. Besides, your name isn't Jack at all; it is Ernest.

JACK

It isn't Ernest; it's Jack.

ALGERNON

You have always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to everyone as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest looking person I ever saw in my life. It is per-

fectly absurd your saying that your name isn't Ernest. It's on your cards. Here is one of them. [*Taking it from case.*] "Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4, The Albany." I'll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendolen, or to anyone else. [*Puts the card in his pocket.*]

JACK

Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country, and the cigarette case was given to me in the country.

ALGERNON

Yes, but that does not account for the fact that your small Aunt Cecily, who lives at Tunbridge Wells, calls you her dear uncle. Come, old boy, you had much better have the thing out at once.

JACK

My dear Algy, you talk exactly as if you were a dentist. It is very vulgar to talk like a dentist when one isn't a dentist. It produces a false impression.

ALGERNON

Well, that is exactly what dentists always do.

Now, go on! Tell me the whole thing. I may mention that I have always suspected you of being a confirmed and secret Bunburyist; and I am quite sure of it now.

JACK

Bunburyist? What on earth do you mean by a Bunburyist?

ALGERNON

I'll reveal to you the meaning of that incomparable expression as soon as you are kind enough to inform me why you are Ernest in town and Jack in the country.

JACK

Well, produce my cigarette case first.

ALGERNON

Here it is. [*Hands cigarette case.*] Now produce your explanation, and pray make it improbable. [*Sits on sofa.*]

JACK

My dear fellow, there is nothing improbable about my explanation at all. In fact it's perfectly ordinary. Old Mr. Thomas Cardew, who adopted me when I was a little boy, made me in

his will guardian to his grand-daughter, Miss Cecily Cardew. Cecily, who addresses me as her uncle from motives of respect that you could not possibly appreciate, lives at my place in the country under the charge of her admirable governess, Miss Prism.

ALGERNON

Where is that place in the country, by the way?

JACK

That is nothing to you, dear boy. You are not going to be invited. . . . I may tell you candidly that the place is not in Shropshire.

ALGERNON

I suspected that, my dear fellow! I have Bunburyed all over Shropshire on two separate occasions. Now, go on. Why are you Ernest in town and Jack in the country?

JACK

My dear Algy, I don't know whether you will be able to understand my real motives. You are hardly serious enough. When one is placed in the position of guardian, one has to adopt a

very high moral tone on all subjects. It's one's duty to do so. And as a high moral tone can hardly be said to conduce very much to either one's health or one's happiness, in order to get up to town I have always pretended to have a younger brother of the name of Ernest, who lives in the Albany, and gets into the most dreadful scrapes. That, my dear Algy, is the whole truth pure and simple.

ALGERNON

The truth is rarely pure and never simple. Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility!

JACK

That wouldn't be at all a bad thing.

ALGERNON

Literary criticism is not your forte, my dear fellow. Don't try it. You should leave that to people who haven't been at a University. They do it so well in the daily papers. What you really are is a Bunburyist. I was quite right in saying you were a Bunburyist. You are one of the most advanced Bunburyists I know.

JACK

What on earth do you mean?

ALGERNON

You have invented a very useful young brother called Ernest, in order that you may be able to come up to town as often as you like. I have invented an invaluable permanent invalid called Bunbury, in order that I may be able to go down into the country whenever I choose. Bunbury is perfectly invaluable. If it wasn't for Bunbury's extraordinary bad health, for instance, I wouldn't be able to dine with you at Willis's to-night, for I have been really engaged to Aunt Augusta for more than a week.

JACK

I haven't asked you to dine with me anywhere to-night.

ALGERNON

I know. You are absurdly careless about sending out invitations. It is very foolish of you. Nothing annoys people so much as not receiving invitations.

JACK

You had much better dine with your Aunt Augusta.

ALGERNON

I haven't the smallest intention of doing anything of the kind. To begin with, I dined there on Monday, and once a week is quite enough to dine with one's own relations. In the second place, whenever I do dine there I am always treated as a member of the family, and sent down with either no woman at all, or two. In the third place, I know perfectly well whom she will place me next to, to-night. She will place me next Mary Farquhar, who always flirts with her own husband across the dinner-table. That is not very pleasant. Indeed, it is not even decent . . . and that sort of thing is enormously on the increase. The amount of women in London who flirt with their own husbands is perfectly scandalous. It looks so bad. It is simply washing one's clean linen in public. Besides, now that I know you to be a confirmed Bunburyist, I naturally want to talk to you about Bunburying. I want to tell you the rules.

JACK

I'm not a Bunburyist at all. If Gwendolen accepts me, I am going to kill my brother, indeed I think I'll kill him in any case. Cecily is a little too much interested in him. It is rather a bore. So I am going to get rid of Ernest. And I strongly advise you to do the same with Mr. . . . with your invalid friend who has the absurd name.

ALGERNON

Nothing will induce me to part with Bunbury, and if you ever get married, which seems to me extremely problematic, you will be very glad to know Bunbury. A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it.

JACK

That is nonsense. If I marry a charming girl like Gwendolen, and she is the only girl I ever saw in my life that I would marry, I certainly won't want to know Bunbury.

ALGERNON

Then your wife will. You don't seem to realize, that in married life three is company and two is none.

JACK

[*Sententiously.*] That, my dear young friend, is the theory that the corrupt French Drama has been propounding for the last fifty years.

ALGERNON

Yes; and that the happy English home has proved in half the time.

JACK

For heaven's sake, don't try to be cynical. It's perfectly easy to be cynical.

ALGERNON

My dear fellow, it isn't easy to be anything now-a-days. There's such a lot of beastly competition about. [*The sound of an electric bell is heard.*] Ah! that must be Aunt Augusta. Only relatives, or creditors, ever ring in that Wagnerian manner. Now, if I get her out of the way for ten minutes, so that you can have an opportunity for proposing to Gwendolen, may I dine with you to-night at Willis's?

JACK

I suppose so, if you want to.

ALGERNON

Yes, but you must be serious about it. I hate people who are not serious about meals. It is so shallow of them.

[*Enter Lane.*]

LANE

Lady Bracknell and Miss Fairfax.

[*Algernon goes forward to meet them. Enter Lady Bracknell and Gwendolen.*]

LADY BRACKNELL

Good afternoon, dear Algernon, I hope you are behaving very well.

ALGERNON

I'm feeling very well, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL

That's not quite the same thing. In fact the two things rarely go together. [*Sees Jack and bows to him with icy coldness.*]

ALGERNON

[*To Gwendolen.*] Dear me, you are smart!

GWENDOLEN

I am always smart! Aren't I, Mr. Worthing?

JACK

You're quite perfect, Miss Fairfax.

GWENDOLEN

Oh! I hope I am not that. It would leave no room for developments, and I intend to develop in many directions. [*Gwendolen and Jack sit down together in the corner.*]

LADY BRACKNELL

I'm sorry if we are a little late, Algernon, but I was obliged to call on dear Lady Harbury. I hadn't been there since her poor husband's death. I never saw a woman so altered; she looks quite twenty years younger. And now I'll have a cup of tea, and one of those nice cucumber sandwiches you promised me.

ALGERNON

Certainly, Aunt Augusta. [*Goes over to tea-table.*]

LADY BRACKNELL

Won't you come and sit here, Gwendolen?

GWENDOLEN

Thanks, mamma, I'm quite comfortable where I am.

ALGERNON

[*Picking up empty plate in horror.*] Good heavens! Lane! Why are there no cucumber sandwiches? I ordered them specially.

LANE

[*Gravely.*] There were no cucumbers in the market this morning, sir. I went down twice.

ALGERNON

No cucumbers!

LANE

No, sir. Not even for ready money.

ALGERNON

That will do, Lane, thank you.

LANE

Thank you, sir.

ALGERNON

I am greatly distressed, Aunt Augusta, about there being no cucumbers, not even for ready money.

LADY BRACKNELL

It really makes no matter, Algernon. I had

some crumpets with Lady Harbury, who seems to me to be living entirely for pleasure now.

ALGERNON

I hear her hair has turned quite gold from grief.

LADY BRACKNELL

It certainly has changed its colour. From what cause I, of course, cannot say. [*Algernon crosses and hands tea.*] Thank you. I've quite a treat for you to-night, Algernon. I am going to send you down with Mary Farquhar. She is such a nice woman, and so attentive to her husband. It's delightful to watch them.

ALGERNON

I am afraid, Aunt Augusta, I shall have to give up the pleasure of dining with you to-night after all.

LADY BRACKNELL

[*Frowning.*] I hope not, Algernon. It would put my table completely out. Your uncle would have to dine upstairs. Fortunately he is accustomed to that.

ALGERNON

It is a great bore, and, I need hardly say, a terrible disappointment to me, but the fact is I have just had a telegram to say that my poor friend Bunbury is very ill again. [*Exchanges glances with Jack.*] They seem to think I should be with him.

LADY BRACKNELL

It is very strange. This Mr. Bunbury seems to suffer from curiously bad health.

ALGERNON

Yes; poor Bunbury is a dreadful invalid.

LADY BRACKNELL

Well, I must say, Algernon, that I think it is high time that Mr. Bunbury made up his mind whether he was going to live or to die. This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd. Nor do I in any way approve of the modern sympathy with invalids. I consider it morbid. Illness of any kind is hardly a thing to be encouraged in others. Health is the primary duty of life. I am always telling that to your poor uncle, but he never seems to take much notice . . . as far as any improvement in his ailments goes. I

should be obliged if you would ask Mr. Bunbury, from me, to be kind enough not to have a relapse on Saturday, for I rely on you to arrange my music for me. It is my last reception, and one wants something that will encourage conversation, particularly at the end of the season when everyone has practically said whatever they had to say, which, in most cases, was probably not much.

ALGERNON

I'll speak to Bunbury, Aunt Augusta, if he is still conscious, and I think I can promise you he'll be all right by Saturday. Of course the music is a great difficulty. You see, if one plays good music, people don't listen, and if one plays bad music, people don't talk. But I'll run over the programme I've drawn out, if you will kindly come into the next room for a moment.

LADY BRACKNELL

Thank you, Algernon. It is very thoughtful of you. [*Rising, and following Algernon.*] I'm sure the programme will be delightful, after a few expurgations. French songs I cannot possibly allow. People always seem to think

that they are improper, and either look shocked, which is vulgar, or laugh, which is worse. But German sounds a thoroughly respectable language, and indeed, I believe is so. Gwendolen, you will accompany me.

GWENDOLEN

Certainly, mamma.

[*Lady Bracknell and Algernon go into the music-room, Gwendolen remains behind.*]

JACK

Charming day it has been, Miss Fairfax.

GWENDOLEN

Pray don't talk to me about the weather, Mr. Worthing. Whenever people talk to me about the weather, I always feel quite certain that they mean something else. And that makes me so nervous.

JACK

I do mean something else.

GWENDOLEN

I thought so. In fact, I am never wrong.

JACK

And I would like to be allowed to take advantage of Lady Bracknell's temporary absence . . .

GWENDOLEN

I would certainly advise you to do so. Mamma has a way of coming back suddenly into a room that I have often had to speak to her about.

JACK

[*Nervously.*] Miss Fairfax, ever since I met you I have admired you more than any girl . . . I have ever met since . . . I met you.

GWENDOLEN

Yes, I am quite aware of the fact. And I often wish that in public, at any rate, you had been more demonstrative. For me you have always had an irresistible fascination. Even before I met you I was far from indifferent to you. [*Jack looks at her in amazement.*] We live, as I hope you know, Mr. Worthing, in an age of ideals. The fact is constantly mentioned in the more expensive monthly magazines, and has reached the provincial pulpits I am told: and my ideal has always been to love some one

of the name of Ernest. There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence. The moment Algernon first mentioned to me that he had a friend called Ernest, I knew I was destined to love you.

JACK

You really love me, Gwendolen?

GWENDOLEN

Passionately!

JACK

Darling! You don't know how happy you've made me.

GWENDOLEN

My own Ernest!

JACK

But you don't really mean to say that you couldn't love me if my name wasn't Ernest?

GWENDOLEN

But your name is Ernest.

JACK

Yes, I know it is. But supposing it was

something else? Do you mean to say you couldn't love me then?

GWENDOLEN

[*Glibly.*] Ah! that is clearly a metaphysical speculation, and like most metaphysical speculations has very little reference at all to the actual facts of real life, as we know them.

JACK

Personally, darling, to speak quite candidly, I don't much care about the name of Ernest . . . I don't think the name suits me at all.

GWENDOLEN

It suits you perfectly. It is a divine name. It has a music of its own. It produces vibrations.

JACK

Well, really, Gwendolen, I must say that I think there are lots of other much nicer names. I think Jack, for instance, a charming name.

GWENDOLEN

Jack? . . . No, there is very little music in the name Jack, if any at all, indeed. It does not thrill. It produces absolutely no vibrations.

. . . I have known several Jacks, and they all, without exception, were more than usually plain. Besides, Jack is a notorious domesticity for John! And I pity any woman who is married to a man called John. She would probably never be allowed to know the entrancing pleasure of a single moment's solitude. The only really safe name is Ernest.

JACK

Gwendolen, I must get christened at once—I mean we must get married at once. There is no time to be lost.

GWENDOLEN

Married, Mr. Worthing?

JACK

[*Astounded.*] Well . . . surely. You know that I love you, and you led me to believe, Miss Fairfax, that you were not absolutely indifferent to me.

GWENDOLEN

I adore you. But you haven't proposed to me yet. Nothing has been said at all about marriage. The subject has not even been touched on.

JACK

Well . . . may I propose to you now?

GWENDOLEN

I think it would be an admirable opportunity. And to spare you any possible disappointment, Mr. Worthing, I think it only fair to tell you quite frankly beforehand that I am fully determined to accept you.

JACK

Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN

Yes, Mr. Worthing, what have you got to say to me?

JACK

You know what I have got to say to you.

GWENDOLEN

Yes, but you don't say it.

JACK

Gwendolen, will you marry me? [*Goes on his knees.*]

GWENDOLEN

Of course I will, darling. How long you have been about it! I am afraid you have had very little experience in how to propose.

JACK

My own one, I have never loved anyone in the world but you.

GWENDOLEN

Yes, but men often propose for practice. I know my brother Gerald does. All my girl-friends tell me so. What wonderfully blue eyes you have, Ernest! They are quite, quite blue. I hope you will always look at me just like that, especially when there are other people present.

[*Enter Lady Bracknell.*]

LADY BRACKNELL

Mr. Worthing! Rise, sir, from this semi-recumbent posture. It is most indecorous.

GWENDOLEN

Mamma! [*He tries to rise; she restrains him.*] I must beg you to retire. This is no place for you. Besides, Mr. Worthing has not quite finished yet.

LADY BRACKNELL

Finished what, may I ask?

GWENDOLEN

I am engaged to Mr. Worthing, mamma. [*They rise together.*]

LADY BRACKNELL

Pardon me, you are not engaged to anyone. When you do become engaged to some one, I, or your father, should his health permit him, will inform you of the fact. An engagement should come on a young girl as a surprise, pleasant or unpleasant, as the case may be. It is hardly a matter that she could be allowed to arrange for herself. . . . And now I have a few questions to put to you, Mr. Worthing. While I am making these inquiries, you, Gwendolen, will wait for me below in the carriage.

GWENDOLEN

[*Reproachfully.*] Mamma!

LADY BRACKNELL

In the carriage, Gwendolen! [*Gwendolen goes to the door. She and Jack blow kisses to each other behind Lady Bracknell's back. Lady*

Bracknell looks vaguely about as if she could not understand what the noise was. Finally turns round.] Gwendolen, the carriage!

GWENDOLEN

Yes, mamma. [*Goes out, looking back at Jack.*]

LADY BRACKNELL

[*Sitting down.*] You can take a seat, Mr. Worthing.

[*Looks in her pocket for note-book and pencil.*]

JACK

Thank you, Lady Bracknell, I prefer standing.

LADY BRACKNELL

[*Pencil and note-book in hand.*] I feel bound to tell you that you are not down on my list of eligible young men, although I have the same list as the dear Duchess of Bolton has. We work together, in fact. However, I am quite ready to enter your name, should your answers be what a really affectionate mother requires. Do you smoke!

JACK

Well, yes, I must admit I smoke.

LADY BRACKNELL

I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation of some kind. There are far too many idle men in London as it is. How old are you?

JACK

Twenty-nine.

LADY BRACKNELL

A very good age to be married at. I have always been of opinion that a man who desires to get married should know either everything or nothing. Which do you know?

JACK

[*After some hesitation.*] I know nothing, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL

I am pleased to hear it. I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is like a delicate exotic fruit; touch it and the bloom is gone. The whole theory of modern education is radically unsound. For-

tunately in England, at any rate, education produces no effect whatsoever. If it did, it would prove a serious danger to the upper classes, and probably lead to acts of violence in Grosvenor Square. What is your income?

JACK

Between seven and eight thousand a year.

LADY BRACKNELL

[*Makes a note in her book.*] In land, or in *investments?*

JACK

In investments, chiefly.

LADY BRACKNELL

That is satisfactory. What between the duties expected of one during one's lifetime, and the duties exacted from one after one's death, land has ceased to be either a profit or a pleasure. It gives one position, and prevents one from keeping it up. That's all that can be said about land.

JACK

I have a country house with some land, of course, attached to it, about fifteen hundred acres, I believe; but I don't depend on that for

my real income. In fact, as far as I can make out, the poachers are the only people who make anything out of it.

LADY BRACKNELL

A country house! How many bedrooms? Well, that point can be cleared up afterwards. You have a town house, I hope? A girl with a simple, unspoiled nature, like Gwendolen, could hardly be expected to reside in the country.

JACK

Well, I own a house in Belgrave Square, but it is let by the year to Lady Bloxham. Of course, I can get it back whenever I like, at six months' notice.

LADY BRACKNELL

Lady Bloxham? I don't know her.

JACK

Oh, she goes about very little. She is a lady considerably advanced in years.

LADY BRACKNELL

Ah, now-a-days that is no guarantee of respectability of character. What number in Belgrave Square?

JACK

149.

LADY BRACKNELL

[*Shaking her head.*] The unfashionable side. I thought there was something. However, that could easily be altered.

JACK

Do you mean the fashion, or the side?

LADY BRACKNELL

[*Sternly.*] Both, if necessary, I presume. What are your politics?

JACK

Well, I am afraid I really have none. I am a Liberal Unionist.

LADY BRACKNELL

Oh, they count as Tories. They dine with us. Or come in the evening, at any rate. Now to minor matters. Are your parents living?

JACK

I have lost both my parents.

LADY BRACKNELL

Both? . . . That seems like carelessness. Who was your father? He was evidently a man of some wealth. Was he born in what the Radical papers call the purple of commerce, or did he rise from the ranks of aristocracy?

JACK

I am afraid I really don't know. The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I said I had lost my parents. It would be nearer the truth to say that my parents seem to have lost me. . . . I don't actually know who I am by birth. I was . . . well, I was found.

LADY BRACKNELL

Found!

JACK

The late Mr. Thomas Cardew, an old gentleman of a very charitable and kindly disposition, found me, and gave me the name of Worthing, because he happened to have a first-class ticket for Worthing in his pocket at the time. Worthing is a place in Sussex. It is a seaside resort.

LADY BRACKNELL

Where did the charitable gentleman who had a first-class ticket for this seaside resort find you?

JACK

[*Gravely.*] In a hand-bag.

LADY BRACKNELL

A hand-bag?

JACK

[*Very seriously.*] Yes, Lady Bracknell. I was in a hand-bag—a somewhat large, black leather hand-bag, with handles to it—an ordinary hand-bag, in fact.

LADY BRACKNELL

In what locality did this Mr. James, or Thomas, Cardew come across this ordinary hand-bag?

JACK

In the cloak-room at Victoria Station. It was given to him in mistake for his own.

LADY BRACKNELL

The cloak-room at Victoria Station?

JACK

Yes. The Brighton line.

LADY BRACKNELL

The line is immaterial. Mr. Worthing, I confess I feel somewhat bewildered by what you have just told me. To be born, or at any rate, bred in a hand-bag, whether it had handles or not, seems to me to display a contempt for the ordinary decencies of family life that remind one of the worst excesses of the French Revolution. And I presume you know what that unfortunate movement led to? As for the particular locality in which the hand-bag was found, a cloak-room at a railway station might serve to conceal a social indiscretion—has probably, indeed, been used for that purpose before now—but it could hardly be regarded as an assured basis for a recognised position in good society.

JACK

May I ask you then what you would advise me to do? I need hardly say I would do anything in the world to ensure Gwendolen's happiness.

LADY BRACKNELL

I would strongly advise you, Mr. Worthing,

to try and acquire some relations as soon as possible, and to make a definite effort to produce at any rate one parent, of either sex, before the season is quite over.

JACK

Well, I don't see how I could possibly manage to do that. I can produce the hand-bag at any moment. It is in my dressing-room at home. I really think that should satisfy you, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL

Me, sir! What has it to do with me? You can hardly imagine that I and Lord Bracknell would dream of allowing our only daughter—a girl brought up with the utmost care—to marry into a cloak-room, and form an alliance with a parcel? Good morning, Mr. Worthing!

[*Lady Bracknell sweeps out in majestic indignation.*]

JACK

Good morning! [*Algernon, from the other room, strikes up the Wedding March. Jack looks perfectly furious, and goes to the door.*] For

goodness' sake don't play that ghastly tune, Algy! How idiotic you are!

[*The music stops, and Algernon enters cheerily.*]

ALGERNON

Didn't it go off all right, old boy? You don't mean to say Gwendolen refused you? I know it is a way she has. She is always refusing people. I think it is most ill-natured of her.

JACK

Oh, Gwendolen is as right as a trivet. As far as she is concerned, we are engaged. Her mother is perfectly unbearable. Never met such a Gorgon . . . I don't really know what a Gorgon is like, but I am quite sure that Lady Bracknell is one. In any case, she is a monster, without being a myth, which is rather unfair . . . I beg your pardon, Algy, I suppose I shouldn't talk about your own aunt in that way before you.

ALGERNON

My dear boy, I love hearing my relations abused. It is the only thing that makes me put up with them at all. Relations are simply a tedious pack of people who haven't got the

remotest knowledge of how to live, nor the smallest instinct about when to die.

JACK

Oh, that is nonsense!

ALGERNON

It isn't!

JACK

Well, I won't argue about the matter. You always want to argue about things.

ALGERNON

That is exactly what things were originally made for.

JACK

Upon my word, if I thought that, I'd shoot myself . . . [*A pause.*] You don't think there is any chance of Gwendolen becoming like her mother in about a hundred and fifty years, do you, Algy?

ALGERNON

All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his.

JACK

Is that clever?

ALGERNON

It is perfectly phrased! and quite as true as any observation in civilized life should be.

JACK

I am sick to death of cleverness. Everybody is clever now-a-days. You can't go anywhere without meeting clever people. The thing has become an absolute public nuisance. I wish to goodness we had a few fools left.

ALGERNON

We have.

JACK

I should extremely like to meet them. What do they talk about?

ALGERNON

The fools? Oh! about the clever people, of course.

JACK

What fools!

ALGERNON

By the way, did you tell Gwendolen the truth about your being Ernest in town, and Jack in the country?

JACK

[*In a very patronising manner.*] My dear fellow, the truth isn't quite the sort of thing one tells to a nice sweet refined girl. What extraordinary ideas you have about the way to behave to a woman!

ALGERNON

The only way to behave to a woman is to make love to her, if she is pretty, and to someone else if she is plain.

JACK

Oh, that is nonsense.

ALGERNON

What about your brother? What about the profligate Ernest?

JACK

Oh, before the end of the week I shall have got rid of him. I'll say he died in Paris of

apoplexy. Lots of people die of apoplexy, quite suddenly, don't they?

ALGERNON

Yes, but it's hereditary, my dear fellow. It's a sort of thing that runs in families. You had much better say a severe chill.

JACK

You are sure a severe chill isn't hereditary, or anything of that kind?

ALGERNON

Of course it isn't!

JACK

Very well, then. My poor brother Ernest is carried off suddenly in Paris, by a severe chill. That gets rid of him.

ALGERNON

But I thought you said that . . . Miss Cardew was a little too much interested in your poor brother Ernest? Won't she feel his loss a good deal?

JACK

Oh, that is all right. Cecily is not a silly

romantic girl, I am glad to say. She has got a capital appetite, goes on long walks, and pays no attention at all to her lessons.

ALGERNON

I would rather like to see Cecily.

JACK

I will take very good care you never do. She is excessively pretty, and she is only just eighteen.

ALGERNON

Have you told Gwendolen yet that you have an excessively pretty ward who is only just eighteen?

JACK

Oh! one doesn't blurt these things out to people. Cecily and Gwendolen are perfectly certain to be extremely great friends. I'll bet you anything you like that half an hour after they have met, they will be calling each other sister.

ALGERNON

Women only do that when they have called each other a lot of other things first. Now, my

dear boy, if we want to get a good table at Willis's, we really must go and dress. Do you know it is nearly seven?

JACK

[*Irritably.*] Oh! it always is nearly seven.

ALGERNON

Well, I'm hungry.

JACK

I never knew you when you weren't. . . .

ALGERNON

What shall we do after dinner? Go to the theatre?

JACK

Oh no! I loathe listening.

ALGERNON

Well, let us go to the club?

JACK

Oh, no! I hate talking.

ALGERNON

Well, we might trot round to the Empire at ten?

JACK

Oh no! I can't bear looking at things. It is so silly.

ALGERNON

Well, what shall we do?

JACK

Nothing!

ALGERNON

It is awfully hard work doing nothing. However, I don't mind hard work where there is no definite object of any kind.

[*Enter Lane.*]

LANE

Miss Fairfax.

[*Enter Gwendolen. Lane goes out.*]

ALGERNON

Gwendolen, upon my word!

GWENDOLEN

Algy, kindly turn your back. I have something very particular to say to Mr. Worthing.

ALGERNON

Really, Gwendolen, I don't think I can allow this at all.

GWENDOLEN

Algy, you always adopt a strictly immoral attitude towards life. You are not quite old enough to do that. [*Algernon retires to the fireplace.*]

JACK

My own darling!

GWENDOLEN

Ernest, we may never be married. From the expression on mamma's face I fear we never shall. Few parents now-a-days pay any regard to what their children say to them. The old-fashioned respect for the young is fast dying out. Whatever influence I ever had over mamma, I lost at the age of three. But although she may prevent us from becoming man and wife, and I may marry someone else, and marry often, nothing that she can possibly do can alter my eternal devotion to you.

JACK

Dear Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN

The story of your romantic origin, as related to me by mamma, with unpleasing comments, has naturally stirred the deeper fibres of my nature. Your Christian name has an irresistible fascination. The simplicity of your character makes you exquisitely incomprehensible to me. Your town address at the Albany I have. What is your address in the country?

JACK

The Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire.

[*Algernon, who has been carefully listening, smiles to himself, and writes the address on his shirt-cuff. Then picks up the Railway Guide.*]

GWENDOLEN

There is a good postal service, I suppose? It may be necessary to do something desperate. That of course will require serious consideration. I will communicate with you daily.

JACK

My own one!

GWENDOLEN

How long do you remain in town?

JACK

Till Monday.

GWENDOLEN

Good! Algy, you may turn round now.

ALGERNON

Thanks, I've turned round already.

GWENDOLEN

You may also ring the bell.

JACK

You will let me see you to your carriage, my own darling?

GWENDOLEN

Certainly.

JACK

[*To Lane, who now enters.*] I will see Miss Fairfax out.

LANE

Yes, sir. [*Jack and Gwendolen go off.*]

[*Lane presents several letters on a salver to Algernon. It is to be surmised that they are bills, as Algernon after looking at the envelopes, tears them up.*]

ALGERNON

A glass of sherry, Lane.

LANE

Yes, sir.

ALGERNON

To-morrow, Lane, I'm going Bunburying.

LANE

Yes, sir.

ALGERNON

I shall probably not be back till Monday. You can put up my dress clothes, my smoking jacket, and all the Bunbury suits . . .

LANE

Yes, sir. [*Handing sherry.*]

ALGERNON

I hope to-morrow will be a fine day, Lane.

LANE

It never is, sir.

ALGERNON

Lane, you're a perfect pessimist.

LANE

I do my best to give satisfaction, sir.

[*Enter Jack. Lane goes off.*]

JACK

There's a sensible, intellectual girl! the only girl I ever cared for in my life. [*Algernon is laughing immoderately.*] What on earth are you so amused at?

ALGERNON

Oh, I'm a little anxious about poor Bunbury, that is all.

JACK

If you don't take care, your friend Bunbury will get you into a serious scrape some day.

ALGERNON

I love scrapes. They are the only things that are never serious.

JACK

Oh, that's nonsense, Algy. You never talk anything but nonsense.

ALGERNON

Nobody ever does.

[*Jack looks indignantly at him, and leaves the room. Algernon lights a cigarette, reads his shirt-cuff, and smiles.*]

ACT-DROP.

SECOND ACT.

SCENE—*Garden at the Manor House. A flight of gray stone steps leads up to the house. The garden, an old-fashioned one, full of roses. Time of year, July. Basket chairs, and a table covered with books, are set under a large yew tree.*

[*Miss Prism discovered seated at the table. Cecily is at the back watering flowers.*]

MISS PRISM

[*Calling.*] Cecily, Cecily! Surely such a utilitarian occupation as the watering of flowers is rather Moulton's duty than yours? Especially at a moment when intellectual pleasures await you. Your German grammar is on the table. Pray open it at page fifteen. We will repeat yesterday's lesson.

CECILY

[*Coming over very slowly.*] But I don't like

German. It isn't at all a becoming language. I know perfectly well that I look quite plain after my German lesson.

MISS PRISM

Child, you know how anxious your guardian is that you should improve yourself in every way. He laid particular stress on your German, as he was leaving for town yesterday. Indeed, he always lays stress on your German when he is leaving for town.

CECILY

Dear Uncle Jack is so very serious! Sometimes he is so serious that I think he cannot be quite well.

MISS PRISM

[*Drawing herself up.*] Your guardian enjoys the best of health, and his gravity of demeanour is especially to be commended in one so comparatively young as he is. I know no one who has a higher sense of duty and responsibility.

CECILY

I suppose that is why he often looks a little bored when we three are together.

MISS PRISM

Cecily! I am surprised at you. Mr. Worthing has many troubles in his life. Idle merriment and triviality would be out of place in his conversation. You must remember his constant anxiety about that unfortunate young man his brother.

CECILY

I wish Uncle Jack would allow that unfortunate young man, his brother, to come down here sometimes. We might have a good influence over him, Miss Prism. I am sure you certainly would. You know German, and geology, and things of that kind influence a man very much. [*Cecily begins to write in her diary.*]

MISS PRISM

[*Shaking her head.*] I do not think that even I could produce any effect on a character that according to his own brother's admission is irretrievably weak and vacillating. Indeed I am not sure that I would desire to reclaim him. I am not in favour of this modern mania for turning bad people into good people at a moment's notice. As a man sows so let him reap. You

must put away your diary, Cecily. I really don't see why you should keep a diary at all.

CECILY

I keep a diary in order to enter the wonderful secrets of my life. If I didn't write them down I should probably forget all about them.

MISS PRISM

Memory, my dear Cecily, is the diary that we all carry about with us.

CECILY

Yes, but it usually chronicles the things that have never happened, and couldn't possibly have happened. I believe that Memory is responsible for nearly all the three-volume novels that Mudie sends us.

MISS PRISM

Do not speak slightingly of the three-volume novel, Cecily. I wrote one myself in earlier days.

CECILY

Did you really, Miss Prism? How wonderfully clever you are! I hope it did not end

happily? I don't like novels that end happily. They depress me so much.

MISS PRISM

The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means.

CECILY

I suppose so. But it seems very unfair. And was your novel ever published?

MISS PRISM

Alas! no. The manuscript unfortunately was abandoned. I use the word in the sense of lost or mislaid. To your work, child, these speculations are profitless.

CECILY

[*Smiling.*] But I see dear Dr. Chasuble coming up through the garden.

MISS PRISM

[*Rising and advancing.*] Dr. Chasuble! This is indeed a pleasure.

[*Enter Canon Chasuble.*]

CHASUBLE

And how are we this morning? Miss Prism, you are, I trust, well?

CECILY

Miss Prism has just been complaining of a slight headache. I think it would do her so much good to have a short stroll with you in the Park, Dr. Chasuble.

MISS PRISM

Cecily, I have not mentioned anything about a headache.

CECILY

No, dear Miss Prism, I know that, but I felt instinctively that you had a headache. Indeed I was thinking about that, and not about my German lesson, when the Rector came in.

CHASUBLE

I hope Cecily, you are not inattentive.

CECILY

Oh, I am afraid I am.

CHASUBLE

That is strange. Were I fortunate enough to be Miss Prism's pupil, I would hang upon her lips. [*Miss Prism glares.*] I spoke metaphorically.—My metaphor was drawn from bees.

Ahem! Mr. Worthing I suppose, has not returned from town yet?

MISS PRISM

We do not expect him till Monday afternoon.

CHASUBLE

Ah yes, he usually likes to spend his Sunday in London. He is not one of those whose sole aim is enjoyment, as, by all accounts, that unfortunate young man his brother seems to be. But I must not disturb Egeria and her pupil any longer.

MISS PRISM

Egeria? My name is Lætitia, Doctor.

CHASUBLE

[*Bowing.*] A classical allusion merely, drawn from the Pagan authors. I shall see you both no doubt at Evensong?

MISS PRISM

I think, dear Doctor, I will have a stroll with you. I find I have a headache after all, and a walk might do it good.

CHASUBLE

With pleasure, Miss Prism, with pleasure. We might go as far as the schools and back.

MISS PRISM

That would be delightful. Cecily, you will read your Political Economy in my absence. The chapter on the Fall of the Rupee you may omit. It is somewhat too sensational. Even these metallic problems have their melodramatic side.

[*Goes down the garden with Dr. Chasuble.*]

CECILY

[*Picks up books and throws them back on table.*] Horrid Political Economy! Horrid Geography! Horrid, horrid German!

[*Enter Merriman with a card on a salver.*]

MERRIMAN

Mr. Ernest Worthing has just driven over from the station. He has brought his luggage with him.

CECILY

[*Takes the card and reads it.*] "Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4 The Albany, W." Uncle Jack's

brother! Did you tell him Mr. Worthing was in town?

MERRIMAN

Yes, Miss. He seemed very much disappointed. I mentioned that you and Miss Prism were in the garden. He said he was anxious to speak to you privately for a moment.

CECILY

Ask Mr. Ernest Worthing to come here. I suppose you had better talk to the housekeeper about a room for him.

MERRIMAN

Yes, Miss. [*Merriman goes off.*]

CECILY

I have never met any really wicked person before. I feel rather frightened. I am so afraid he will look just like everyone else.

[*Enter Algernon, very gay and debonair.*]

He does!

ALGERNON

[*Raising his hat.*] You are my little cousin Cecily, I'm sure.

CECILY

You are under some strange mistake. I am not little. In fact, I believe I am more than usually tall for my age. [*Algernon is rather taken aback.*] But I am your cousin Cecily. You, I see from your card, are Uncle Jack's brother, my cousin Ernest, my wicked cousin Ernest.

ALGERNON

Oh! I am not really wicked at all, cousin Cecily. You mustn't think that I am wicked.

CECILY

If you are not, then you have certainly been deceiving us all in a very inexcusable manner. I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and being really good all the time. That would be hypocrisy.

ALGERNON

[*Looks at her in amazement.*] Oh! Of course I have been rather reckless.

CECILY

I am glad to hear it.

ALGERNON

In fact, now you mention the subject, I have been very bad in my own small way.

CECILY

I don't think you should be so proud of that, though I am sure it must have been very pleasant.

ALGERNON

It is much pleasanter being here with you.

CECILY

I can't understand how you are here at all. Uncle Jack won't be back till Monday afternoon.

ALGERNON

That is a great disappointment. I am obliged to go up by the first train on Monday morning. I have a business appointment that I am anxious . . . to miss.

CECILY

Couldn't you miss it anywhere but in London?

ALGERNON

No: the appointment is in London.

CECILY

Well, I know, of course, how important it is not to keep a business engagement, if one wants to retain any sense of the beauty of life, but still I think you had better wait till Uncle Jack arrives. I know he wants to speak to you about your emigrating.

ALGERNON

About my what?

CECILY

Your emigrating. He has gone up to buy your outfit.

ALGERNON

I certainly wouldn't let Jack buy my outfit. He has no taste in neckties at all.

CECILY

I don't think you will require neckties. Uncle Jack is sending you to Australia.

ALGERNON

Australia? I'd sooner die.

CECILY

Well, he said at dinner on Wednesday night,

that you would have to choose between this world, the next world, and Australia.

ALGERNON

Oh, well! The accounts I have received of Australia and the next world are not particularly encouraging. This world is good enough for me, cousin Cecily.

CECILY

Yes, but are you good enough for it?

ALGERNON

I'm afraid I'm not that. That is why I want you to reform me. You might make that your mission, if you don't mind, cousin Cecily.

CECILY

I'm afraid I've no time, this afternoon.

ALGERNON

Well, would you mind my reforming myself this afternoon?

CECILY

It is rather Quixotic of you. But I think you should try.

ALGERNON

I will. I feel better already.

CECILY

You are looking a little worse.

ALGERNON

That is because I am hungry.

CECILY

How thoughtless of me. I should have remembered that when one is going to lead an entirely new life, one requires regular and wholesome meals. Won't you come in?

ALGERNON

Thank you. Might I have a button-hole first? I never have any appetite unless I have a button-hole first.

CECILY

A Maréchale Niel? [*Picks up scissors.*]

ALGERNON

No, I'd sooner have a pink rose.

CECILY

Why? [*Cuts a flower.*]

ALGERNON

Because you are like a pink rose, cousin Cecily.

CECILY

I don't think it can be right for you to talk to me like that. Miss Prism never says such things to me.

ALGERNON

Then Miss Prism is a short-sighted old lady. [*Cecily puts the rose in his button-hole.*] You are the prettiest girl I ever saw.

CECILY

Miss Prism says that all good looks are a snare.

ALGERNON

They are a snare that every sensible man would like to be caught in.

CECILY

Oh! I don't think I would care to catch a sensible man. I shouldn't know what to talk to him about.

[*They pass into the house. Miss Prism and Dr. Chasuble return.*]

MISS PRISM

You are too much alone, dear Dr. Chasuble. You should get married. A misanthrope I can understand—a womanthrope, never!

CHASUBLE

[*With a scholar's shudder.*] Believe me, I do not deserve so neologistic a phrase. The precept as well as the practice of the Primitive Church was distinctly against matrimony.

MISS PRISM

[*Sententiously.*] That is obviously the reason why the Primitive Church has not lasted up to the present day. And you do not seem to realize, dear Doctor, that by persistently remaining single, a man converts himself into a permanent public temptation. Men should be more careful; this very celibacy leads weaker vessels astray.

CHASUBLE

But is a man not equally attractive when married?

MISS PRISM

No married man is ever attractive except to his wife.

CHASUBLE

And often, I've been told, not even to her.

MISS PRISM

That depends on the intellectual sympathies of the woman. Maturity can always be depended on. Ripeness can be trusted. Young women are green. [*Dr. Chasuble starts.*] I spoke horticulturally. My metaphor was drawn from fruits. But where is Cecily?

CHASUBLE

Perhaps she followed us to the schools.

[*Enter Jack slowly from the back of the garden. He is dressed in the deepest mourning, with crape hat-band and black gloves.*]

MISS PRISM

Mr. Worthing!

CHASUBLE

Mr. Worthing?

MISS PRISM

This is indeed a surprise. We did not look for you till Monday afternoon.

JACK

[*Shakes Miss Prism's hand in a tragic manner.*] I have returned sooner than I expected. Dr. Chasuble, I hope you are well?

CHASUBLE

Dear Mr. Worthing, I trust this garb of woe does not betoken some terrible calamity?

JACK

My brother.

MISS PRISM

More shameful debts and extravagance?

CHASUBLE

Still leading his life of pleasure?

JACK

[*Shaking his head.*] Dead!

CHASUBLE

Your brother Ernest dead?

JACK

Quite dead.

MISS PRISM

What a lesson for him! I trust he will profit by it.

CHASUBLE

Mr. Worthing, I offer you my sincere condolence. You have at least the consolation of knowing that you were always the most generous and forgiving of brothers.

JACK

Poor Ernest! He had many faults, but it is a sad, sad blow.

CHASUBLE

Very sad indeed. Were you with him at the end?

JACK

No. He died abroad; in Paris, in fact. I had a telegram last night from the manager of the Grand Hotel.

CHASUBLE

Was the cause of death mentioned?

JACK

A severe chill, it seems.

MISS PRISM

As a man sows, so shall he reap.

CHASUBLE

[*Raising his hand.*] Charity, dear Miss Prism, charity! None of us are perfect. I myself am peculiarly susceptible to draughts. Will the interment take place here?

JACK

No. He seemed to have expressed a desire to be buried in Paris.

CHASUBLE

In Paris! [*Shakes his head.*] I fear that hardly points to any very serious state of mind at the last. You would no doubt wish me to make some slight allusion to this tragic domestic affliction next Sunday. [*Jack presses his hand convulsively.*] My sermon on the meaning of the manna in the wilderness can be adapted to almost any occasion, joyful, or, as in the present case, distressing. [*All sigh.*] I have preached it at harvest celebrations, christenings, confirmations, on days of humiliation and festal days. The last time I delivered it was in the Cathedral, as a charity sermon on behalf of the Society for

the Prevention of Discontent among the Upper Orders. The Bishop, who was present, was much struck by some of the analogies I drew.

JACK

Ah! that reminds me, you mentioned christenings, I think, Dr. Chasuble? I suppose you know how to christen all right? [*Dr. Chasuble looks astounded.*] I mean, of course, you are continually christening, aren't you?

MISS PRISM

It is, I regret to say, one of the Rector's most constant duties in this parish. I have often spoken to the poorer classes on the subject. But they don't seem to know what thrift is.

CHASUBLE

But is there any particular infant in whom you are interested, Mr. Worthing? Your brother was, I believe, unmarried, was he not?

JACK

Oh yes.

MISS PRISM

[*Bitterly.*] People who live entirely for pleasure usually are.

JACK

But it is not for any child, dear Doctor. I am very fond of children. No! the fact is, I would like to be christened myself, this afternoon, if you have nothing better to do.

CHASUBLE

But surely, Mr. Worthing, you have been christened already?

JACK

I don't remember anything about it.

CHASUBLE

But have you any grave doubts on the subject?

JACK

I certainly intend to have. Of course I don't know if the thing would bother you in any way, or if you think I am a little too old now.

CHASUBLE

Not at all. The sprinkling, and, indeed, the immersion of adults is a perfectly canonical practice.

JACK

Immersion!

CHASUBLE

You need have no apprehensions. Sprinkling is all that is necessary, or indeed I think advisable. Our weather is so changeable. At what hour would you wish the ceremony performed?

JACK

Oh, I might trot round about five if that would suit you.

CHASUBLE

Perfectly, perfectly! In fact I have two similar ceremonies to perform at that time. A case of twins that occurred recently in one of the outlying cottages on your own estate. Poor Jenkins the carter, a most hard-working man.

JACK

Oh! I don't see much fun in being christened along with other babies. It would be childish. Would half-past five do?

CHASUBLE

Admirably! Admirably! [*Takes out watch.*]

And now, dear Mr. Worthing, I will not intrude any longer into a house of sorrow. I would merely beg you not to be too much bowed down by grief. What seem to us bitter trials are often blessings in disguise.

MISS PRISM

This seems to me a blessing of an extremely obvious kind.

[*Enter Cecily from the house.*]

CECILY

Uncle Jack! Oh, I am pleased to see you back. But what horrid clothes you have got on! Do go and change them.

MISS PRISM

Cecily!

CHASUBLE

My child! my child! [*Cecily goes towards Jack; he kisses her brow in a melancholy manner.*]

CECILY

What is the matter, Uncle Jack? Do look happy! You look as if you had toothache, and

I have got such a surprise for you. Who do you think is in the dining-room? Your brother!

JACK

Who?

CECILY

Your brother Ernest. He arrived about half an hour ago.

JACK

What nonsense! I haven't got a brother!

CECILY

Oh, don't say that. However badly he may have behaved to you in the past he is still your brother. You couldn't be so heartless as to disown him. I'll tell him to come out. And you will shake hands with him, won't you, Uncle Jack? [*Runs back into the house.*]

CHASUBLE

These are very joyful tidings.

MISS PRISM

After we had all been resigned to his loss, his sudden return seems to me peculiarly distressing.

JACK

My brother is in the dining-room? I don't know what it all means. I think it is perfectly absurd.

[*Enter Algernon and Cecily hand in hand. They come slowly up to Jack.*]

JACK

Good heavens! [*Motions Algernon away.*]

ALGERNON

Brother John, I have come down from town to tell you that I am very sorry for all the trouble I have given you, and that I intend to lead a better life in the future. [*Jack glares at him and does not take his hand.*]

CECILY

Uncle Jack, you are not going to refuse your own brother's hand?

JACK

Nothing will induce me to take his hand. I think his coming down here disgraceful. He knows perfectly well why.

CECILY

Uncle Jack, do be nice. There is some good in

everyone. Ernest has just been telling me about his poor invalid friend Mr. Bunbury whom he goes to visit so often. And surely there must be much good in one who is kind to an invalid, and leaves the pleasures of London to sit by a bed of pain.

JACK

Oh! he has been talking about Bunbury, has he?

CECILY

Yes, he has told me all about poor Mr. Bunbury, and his terrible state of health.

JACK

Bunbury! Well, I won't have him talk to you about Bunbury or about anything else. It is enough to drive one perfectly frantic.

ALGERNON

Of course I admit that the faults were all on my side. But I must say that I think that Brother John's coldness to me is peculiarly painful. I expected a more enthusiastic welcome, especially considering it is the first time I have come here.

CECILY

Uncle Jack, if you don't shake hands with Ernest, I will never forgive you.

JACK

Never forgive me?

CECILY

Never, never, never!

JACK

Well, this is the last time I shall ever do it.

[*Shakes hands with Algernon and glares.*]

CHASUBLE

It's pleasant, is it not, to see so perfect a reconciliation? I think we might leave the two brothers together.

MISS PRISM

Cecily, you will come with us.

CECILY

Certainly, Miss Prism. My little task of reconciliation is over.

CHASUBLE

You have done a beautiful action to-day, dear child.

MISS PRISM

We must not be premature in our judgments.

CECILY

I feel very happy. . . . [*They all go off.*]

JACK

You young scoundrel, Algy, you must get out of this place as soon as possible. I don't allow any Bunburying here.

[*Enter Merriman.*]

MERRIMAN

I have put Mr. Ernest's things in the room next to yours, sir. I suppose that is all right?

JACK

What?

MERRIMAN

Mr. Ernest's luggage, sir. I have unpacked it and put it in the room next to your own.

JACK

His luggage?

MERRIMAN

Yes, sir. Three portmanteaus, a dressing-case, two hat boxes, and a large luncheon-basket.

ALGERNON

I am afraid I can't stay more than a week this time.

JACK

Merriman, order the dog-cart at once. Mr. Ernest has been suddenly called back to town.

MERRIMAN

Yes, sir. [*Goes back into the house.*]

ALGERNON

What a fearful liar you are, Jack. I have not been called back to town at all.

JACK

Yes, you have.

ALGERNON

I haven't heard anyone call me.

JACK

Your duty as a gentleman calls you back.

ALGERNON

My duty as a gentleman has never interfered with my pleasures in the smallest degree.

JACK

I can quite understand that.

ALGERNON

Well, Cecily is a darling.

JACK

You are not to talk of Miss Cardew like that. I don't like it.

ALGERNON

Well, I don't like your clothes. You look perfectly ridiculous in them. Why on earth don't you go up and change? It is perfectly childish to be in deep mourning for a man who is actually staying for a whole week with you in your house as a guest. I call it grotesque.

JACK

You are certainly not staying with me for a whole week as a guest or anything else. You have got to leave . . . by the four-five train.

ALGERNON

I certainly won't leave you so long as you are in mourning. It would be most unfriendly. If I were in mourning you would stay with me, I suppose. I should think it very unkind if you didn't.

JACK

Well, will you go if I change my clothes?

ALGERNON

Yes, if you are not too long. I never saw anybody take so long to dress, and with such little result.

JACK

Well, at any rate, that is better than being always over-dressed as you are.

ALGERNON

If I am occasionally a little over-dressed, I make up for it by being always immensely over-educated.

JACK

Your vanity is ridiculous, your conduct an outrage, and your presence in my garden utterly absurd. However, you have got to catch the

four-five, and I hope you will have a pleasant journey back to town. This Bunburying, as you call it, has not been a great success for you.

[*Goes into the house.*]

ALGERNON

I think it has been a great success. I'm in love with Cecily, and that is everything.

[*Enter Cecily at the back of the garden. She picks up the can and begins to water the flowers.*]

But I must see her before I go, and make arrangements for another Bunbury. Ah, there she is.

CECILY

Oh, I merely came back to water the roses. I thought you were with Uncle Jack.

ALGERNON

He's gone to order the dog-cart for me.

CECILY

Oh, is he going to take you for a nice drive?

ALGERNON

He's going to send me away.

CECILY

Then have we got to part?

ALGERNON

I am afraid so. It's very painful parting.

CECILY

It is always painful to part from people whom one has known for a very brief space of time. The absence of old friends one can endure with equanimity. But even a momentary separation from anyone to whom one has just been introduced is almost unbearable.

ALGERNON

Thank you.

[*Enter Merriman.*]

MERRIMAN

The dog-cart is at the door, sir. [*Algernon looks appealingly at Cecily.*]

CECILY

It can wait, Merriman . . . for . . . five minutes.

MERRIMAN

Yes, Miss. [*Exit Merriman.*]

ALGERNON

I hope, Cecily, I shall not offend you if I state quite frankly and openly that you seem to me to be in every way the visible personification of absolute perfection.

CECILY

I think your frankness does you great credit, Ernest. If you will allow me I will copy your remarks into my diary. [*Goes over to table and begins writing in diary.*]

ALGERNON

Do you really keep a diary? I'd give anything to look at it. May I?

CECILY

Oh no. [*Puts her hand over it.*] You see, it is simply a very young girl's record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication. When it appears in volume form I hope you will order a copy. But pray, Ernest, don't stop. I delight in taking down from dictation. I have reached "absolute perfection." You can go on. I am quite ready for more.

ALGERNON

[*Somewhat taken aback.*] Ahem! Ahem!

CECILY

Oh, don't cough, Ernest. When one is dictating one should speak fluently and not cough. Besides, I don't know how to spell a cough. [*Writes as Algernon speaks.*]

ALGERNON

[*Speaking very rapidly.*] Cecily, ever since I first looked upon your wonderful and incomparable beauty, I have dared to love you wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly.

CECILY

I don't think that you should tell me that you love me wildly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly. Hopelessly doesn't seem to make much sense, does it?

ALGERNON

Cecily!

[*Enter Merriman.*]

MERRIMAN

The dog-cart is waiting, sir.

ALGERNON

Tell it to come round next week, at the same hour.

MERRIMAN

[*Looks at Cecily, who makes no sign.*] Yes, sir. [*Merriman retires.*]

CECILY

Uncle Jack would be very much annoyed if he knew you were staying on till next week, at the same hour.

ALGERNON

Oh, I don't care about Jack. I don't care for anybody in the whole world but you. I love you, Cecily. You will marry me, won't you?

CECILY

You silly boy! Of course. Why, we have been engaged for the last three months.

ALGERNON

For the last three months?

CECILY

Yes, it will be exactly three months on Thursday.

ALGERNON

But how did we become engaged?

CECILY

Well, ever since dear Uncle Jack first confessed to us that he had a younger brother who was very wicked and bad, you of course have formed the chief topic of conversation between myself and Miss Prism. And of course a man who is much talked about is always very attractive. One feels there must be something in him after all. I daresay it was foolish of me, but I fell in love with you, Ernest.

ALGERNON

Darling! And when was the engagement actually settled?

CECILY

On the 14th of February last. Worn out by your entire ignorance of my existence, I determined to end the matter one way or the other, and after a long struggle with myself I accepted you under this dear old tree here. The next day I bought this little ring in your name, and this is the little bangle with the true lovers' knot I promised you always to wear.

ALGERNON

Did I give you this? It's very pretty, isn't it?

CECILY

Yes, you've wonderfully good taste, Ernest. It's the excuse I've always given for your leading such a bad life. And this is the box in which I keep all your dear letters. [*Kneels at table, opens box, and produces letters tied up with blue ribbon.*]

ALGERNON

My letters! But my own sweet Cecily, I have never written you any letters.

CECILY

You need hardly remind me of that, Ernest. I remember only too well that I was forced to write your letters for you. I always wrote three times a week, and sometimes oftener.

ALGERNON

Oh, do let me read them, Cecily?

CECILY

Oh, I couldn't possibly. They would make you far too conceited. [*Replaces box.*] The three you wrote me after I had broken off the

engagement are so beautiful, and so badly spelled, that even now I can hardly read them without crying a little.

ALGERNON

But was our engagement ever broken off?

CECILY

Of course it was. On the 22nd of last March. You can see the entry if you like. [*Shows diary.*] "To-day I broke off my engagement with Ernest. I feel it is better to do so. The weather still continues charming."

ALGERNON

But why on earth did you break it off? What had I done? I had done nothing at all. Cecily, I am very much hurt indeed to hear you broke it off. Particularly when the weather was so charming.

CECILY

It would hardly have been a really serious engagement if it hadn't been broken off at least once. But I forgave you before the week was out.

ALGERNON

[*Crossing to her, and kneeling.*] What a perfect angel you are, Cecily.

CECILY

You dear romantic boy. [*He kisses her, she puts her fingers through his hair.*] I hope your hair curls naturally, does it?

ALGERNON

Yes, darling, with a little help from others.

CECILY

I am so glad.

ALGERNON

You'll never break off our engagement again, Cecily?

CECILY

I don't think I could break it off now that I have actually met you. Besides, of course, there is the question of your name.

ALGERNON

Yes, of course. [*Nervously.*]

CECILY

You must not laugh at me, darling, but it had

always been a girlish dream of mine to love some one whose name was Ernest. [*Algernon rises, Cecily also.*] There is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute confidence. I pity any poor married woman whose husband is not called Ernest.

ALGERNON

But, my dear child, do you mean to say you could not love me if I had some other name?

CECILY

But what name?

ALGERNON

Oh, any name you like—Algernon—for instance . . .

CECILY

But I don't like the name of Algernon.

ALGERNON

Well, my own dear, sweet, loving little darling, I really can't see why you should object to the name of Algernon. It is not at all a bad name. In fact, it is rather an aristocratic name. Half of the chaps who get into the Bankruptcy Court are called Algernon. But seriously, Cecily . . .

[*Moving to her*] . . . if my name was Algy, couldn't you love me?

CECILY

[*Rising.*] I might respect you, Ernest, I might admire your character, but I fear that I should not be able to give you my undivided attention.

ALGERNON

Ahem! Cecily! [*Picking up hat.*] Your Rector here is, I suppose, thoroughly experienced in the practice of all the rites and ceremonials of the Church?

CECILY

Oh, yes. Dr. Chasuble is a most learned man. He has never written a single book, so you can imagine how much he knows.

ALGERNON

I must see him at once on a most important christening—I mean on most important business.

CECILY

Oh!

ALGERNON

I shan't be away more than half an hour.

CECILY

Considering that we have been engaged since February the 14th, and that I only met you to-day for the first time, I think it is rather hard that you should leave me for so long a period as half an hour. Couldn't you make it twenty minutes?

ALGERNON

I'll be back in no time.

[*Kisses her and rushes down the garden.*]

CECILY

What an impetuous boy he is! I like his hair so much. I must enter his proposal in my diary.

[*Enter Merriman.*]

MERRIMAN

A Miss Fairfax has just called to see Mr. Worthing. On very important business Miss Fairfax states.

CECILY

Isn't Mr. Worthing in his library?

MERRIMAN

Mr. Worthing went over in the direction of the Rectory some time ago.

CECILY

Pray ask the lady to come out here; Mr. Worthing is sure to be back soon. And you can bring tea.

MERRIMAN

Yes, Miss. [*Goes out.*]

CECILY

Miss Fairfax! I suppose one of the many good elderly women who are associated with Uncle Jack in some of his philanthropic work in London. I don't quite like women who are interested in philanthropic work. I think it is so forward of them.

[*Enter Merriman.*]

MERRIMAN

Miss Fairfax.

[*Enter Gwendolen.*] [*Exit Merriman.*]

CECILY

[*Advancing to meet her.*] Pray let me introduce myself to you. My name is Cecily Cardew.

GWENDOLEN

Cecily Cardew? [*Moving to her and shaking hands.*] What a very sweet name! Something tells me that we are going to be great friends. I like you already more than I can say. My first impressions of people are never wrong.

CECILY

How nice of you to like me so much after we have known each other such a comparatively short time. Pray sit down.

GWENDOLEN

[*Still standing up.*] I may call you Cecily, may I not?

CECILY

With pleasure!

GWENDOLEN

And you will always call me Gwendolen, won't you?

CECILY

If you wish.

GWENDOLEN

Then that is all quite settled, is it not?

CECILY

I hope so. [*A pause. They both sit down together.*]

GWENDOLEN

Perhaps this might be a favourable opportunity for my mentioning who I am. My father is Lord Bracknell. You have never heard of papa, I suppose?

CECILY

I don't think so.

GWENDOLEN

Outside the family circle, papa, I am glad to say, is entirely unknown. I think that is quite as it should be. The home seems to me to be the proper sphere for the man. And certainly once a man begins to neglect his domestic duties he becomes painfully effeminate, does he not? And I don't like that. It makes men so very attractive. Cecily, mamma, whose views on education are remarkably strict, has brought me up to be extremely short-sighted; it is part of her system; so do you mind my looking at you through my glasses?

CECILY

Oh! not at all, Gwendolen. I am very fond of being looked at.

GWENDOLEN

[*After examining Cecily carefully through a lorgnette.*] You are here on a short visit I suppose.

CECILY

Oh no! I live here.

GWENDOLEN

[*Severely.*] Really? Your mother, no doubt, or some female relative of advanced years, resides here also?

CECILY

Oh no! I have no mother, nor, in fact, any relations.

GWENDOLEN

Indeed?

CECILY

My dear guardian, with the assistance of Miss Prism, has the arduous task of looking after me.

GWENDOLEN

Your guardian?

CECILY

Yes, I am Mr. Worthing's ward.

GWENDOLEN

Oh! It is strange he never mentioned to me that he had a ward. How secretive of him! He grows more interesting hourly. I am not sure, however, that the news inspires me with feelings of unmixed delight. [*Rising and going to her.*] I am very fond of you, Cecily; I have liked you ever since I met you! But I am bound to state that now that I know that you are Mr. Worthing's ward, I cannot help expressing a wish you were—well just a little older than you seem to be—and not quite so very alluring in appearance. In fact, if I may speak candidly——

CECILY

Pray do! I think that whenever one has anything unpleasant to say, one should always be quite candid.

GWENDOLEN

Well, to speak with perfect candour, Cecily,

I wish that you were fully forty-two, and more than usually plain for your age. Ernest has a strong upright nature. He is the very soul of truth and honour. Disloyalty would be as impossible to him as deception. But even men of the noblest possible moral character are extremely susceptible to the influence of the physical charms of others. Modern, no less than Ancient History, supplies us with many most painful examples of what I refer to. If it were not so, indeed, History would be quite unreadable.

CECILY

I beg your pardon, Gwendolen, did you say Ernest?

GWENDOLEN

Yes.

CECILY

Oh, but it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is my guardian. It is his brother—his elder brother.

GWENDOLEN

[*Sitting down again.*] Ernest never mentioned to me that he had a brother.

CECILY

I am sorry to say they have not been on good terms for a long time.

GWENDOLEN

Ah! that accounts for it. And now that I think of it I have never heard any man mention his brother. The subject seems distasteful to most men. Cecily, you have lifted a load from my mind. I was growing almost anxious. It would have been terrible if any cloud had come across a friendship like ours, would it not? Of course you are quite, quite sure that it is not Mr. Ernest Worthing who is your guardian?

CECILY

Quite sure. [*A pause.*] In fact, I am going to be his.

GWENDOLEN

[*Enquiringly.*] I beg your pardon?

CECILY

[*Rather shy and confidingly.*] Dearest Gwendolen, there is no reason why I should make a secret of it to you. Our little county newspaper is sure to chronicle the fact next week. Mr.

Ernest Worthing and I are engaged to be married.

GWENDOLEN

[*Quite politely, rising.*] My darling Cecily, I think there must be some slight error. Mr. Ernest Worthing is engaged to me. The announcement will appear in the "Morning Post" on Saturday at the latest.

CECILY

[*Very politely, rising.*] I am afraid you must be under some misconception. Ernest proposed to me exactly ten minutes ago. [*Shows diary.*]

GWENDOLEN

[*Examines diary through her lorgnette carefully.*] It is certainly very curious, for he asked me to be his wife yesterday afternoon at 5:30. If you would care to verify the incident, pray do so. [*Produces diary of her own.*] I never travel without my diary. One should always have something sensational to read in the train. I am so sorry, dear Cecily, if it is any disappointment to you, but I am afraid *I* have the prior claim.

CECILY

It would distress me more than I can tell you, dear Gwendolen, if it caused you any mental or physical anguish, but I feel bound to point out that since Ernest proposed to you he clearly has changed his mind.

GWENDOLEN

[*Meditatively.*] If the poor fellow has been entrapped into any foolish promise I shall consider it my duty to rescue him at once, and with a firm hand.

CECILY

[*Thoughtfully and sadly.*] Whatever unfortunate entanglement my dear boy may have got into, I will never reproach him with it after we are married.

GWENDOLEN

Do you allude to me, Miss Cardew, as an entanglement? You are presumptuous. On an occasion of this kind it becomes more than a moral duty to speak one's mind. It becomes a pleasure.

CECILY

Do you suggest, Miss Fairfax, that I entrapped Ernest into an engagement? How dare you? This is no time for wearing the shallow mask of manners. When I see a spade I call it a spade.

GWENDOLEN

[*Satirically.*] I am glad to say that I have never seen a spade. It is obvious that our social spheres have been widely different.

[*Enter Merriman, followed by the footman. He carries a salver, table cloth, and plate stand. Cecily is about to retort. The presence of the servants exercises a restraining influence, under which both girls chafe.*]

MERRIMAN

Shall I lay tea here as usual, Miss?

CECILY

[*Sternly, in a calm voice.*] Yes, as usual. [*Merriman begins to clear table and lay cloth. A long pause. Cecily and Gwendolen glare at each other.*]

GWENDOLEN

Are there many interesting walks in the vicinity, Miss Cardew?

CECILY

Oh! yes! a great many. From the top of one of the hills quite close one can see five counties.

GWENDOLEN

Five counties! I don't think I should like that. I hate crowds.

CECILY

[*Sweetly.*] I suppose that is why you live in town? [*Gwendolen bites her lip, and beats her foot nervously with her parasol.*]

GWENDOLEN

[*Looking round.*] Quite a well-kept garden this is, Miss Cardew.

CECILY

So glad you like it, Miss Fairfax.

GWENDOLEN

I had no idea there were any flowers in the country.

CECILY

Oh, flowers are as common here, Miss Fairfax, as people are in London.

GWENDOLEN

Personally I cannot understand how anybody manages to exist in the country, if anybody who is anybody does. The country always bores me to death.

CECILY

Ah! This is what the newspapers call agricultural depression, is it not? I believe the aristocracy are suffering very much from it just at present. It is almost an epidemic amongst them, I have been told. May I offer you some tea, Miss Fairfax?

GWENDOLEN

[*With elaborate politeness.*] Thank you. [*Aside.*] Detestable girl! But I require tea!

CECILY

[*Sweetly.*] Sugar?

GWENDOLEN

[*Superciliously.*] No, thank you. Sugar is not fashionable any more. [*Cecily looks angrily*

at her, takes up the tongs and puts four lumps of sugar into the cup.]

CECILY

[*Severely.*] Cake or bread and butter?

GWENDOLEN

[*In a bored manner.*] Bread and butter, please. Cake is rarely seen at the best houses nowadays.

CECILY

[*Cuts a very large slice of cake, and puts it on the tray.*] Hand that to Miss Fairfax.

[*Merriman does so, and goes out with footman. Gwendolen drinks the tea and makes a grimace. Puts down cup at once, reaches out her hand to the bread and butter, looks at it, and finds it is cake. Rises in indignation.*]

GWENDOLEN

You have filled my tea with lumps of sugar, and though I asked most distinctly for bread and butter, you have given me cake. I am known for the gentleness of my disposition, and the extraordinary sweetness of my nature, but I warn you, Miss Cardew, you may go too far.

CECILY

[*Rising.*] To save my poor, innocent, trusting boy from the machinations of any other girl there are no lengths to which I would not go.

GWENDOLEN

From the moment I saw you I distrusted you. I felt that you were false and deceitful. I am never deceived in such matters. My first impressions of people are invariably right.

CECILY

It seems to me, Miss Fairfax, that I am trespassing on your valuable time. No doubt you have many other calls of a similar character to make in the neighbourhood.

[*Enter Jack.*]

GWENDOLEN

[*Catching sight of him.*] Ernest! My own Ernest!

JACK

Gwendolen! Darling! [*Offers to kiss her.*]

GWENDOLEN

[*Drawing back.*] A moment! May I ask if

you are engaged to be married to this young lady? [*Points to Cecily.*]

JACK

[*Laughing.*] To dear little Cecily! Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

GWENDOLEN

Thank you. You may! [*Offers her cheek.*]

CECILY

[*Very sweetly.*] I knew there must be some misunderstanding, Miss Fairfax. The gentleman whose arm is at present round your waist is my dear guardian, Mr. John Worthing.

GWENDOLEN

I beg your pardon?

CECILY

This is Uncle Jack.

GWENDOLEN

[*Receding.*] Jack! Oh!

[*Enter Algernon.*]

CECILY

Here is Ernest.

ALGERNON

[*Goes straight over to Cecily without noticing anyone else.*] My own love! [*Offers to kiss her.*]

CECILY

[*Drawing back.*]. A moment, Ernest! May I ask you—are you engaged to be married to this young lady?

ALGERNON

[*Looking round.*] To what young lady? Good heavens! Gwendolen!

CECILY

Yes! to good heavens, Gwendolen, I mean to Gwendolen.

ALGERNON

[*Laughing.*] Of course not! What could have put such an idea into your pretty little head?

CECILY

Thank you. [*Presenting her cheek to be kissed.*] You may. [*Algernon kisses her.*]

GWENDOLEN

I felt there was some slight error, Miss Cardew. The gentleman who is now embracing you is my cousin, Mr. Algernon Moncrieff.

CECILY

[*Breaking away from Algernon.*] Algernon Moncrieff! Oh! [*The two girls move towards each other and put their arms round each other's waists as if for protection.*]

CECILY

Are you called Algernon?

ALGERNON

I cannot deny it.

CECILY

Oh!

GWENDOLEN

Is your name really John?

JACK

[*Standing rather proudly.*] I could deny it if I liked. I could deny anything if I liked. But my name certainly is John. It has been John for years.

CECILY

[*To Gwendolen.*] A gross deception has been practised on both of us.

GWENDOLEN

My poor wounded Cecily!

CECILY

My sweet wronged Gwendolen!

GWENDOLEN

[*Slowly and seriously.*] You will call me sister, will you not? [*They embrace. Jack and Algernon groan and walk up and down.*]

CECILY

[*Rather brightly.*] There is just one question I would like to be allowed to ask my guardian.

GWENDOLEN

An admirable idea! Mr. Worthing, there is just one question I would like to be permitted to put to you. Where is your brother Ernest? We are both engaged to be married to your brother Ernest, so it is a matter of some importance to us to know where your brother Ernest is at present.

JACK

[*Slowly and hesitatingly.*] Gwendolen—Cecily —it is very painful for me to be forced to speak the truth. It is the first time in my life that I have ever been reduced to such a painful position, and I am really quite inexperienced in doing anything of the kind. However I will tell you quite frankly that I have no brother Ernest. I have no brother at all. I never had a brother in my life, and I certainly have not the smallest intention of ever having one in the future.

CECILY

[*Surprised.*] No brother at all?

JACK

[*Cheerily.*] None!

GWENDOLEN

[*Severely.*] Had you never a brother of any kind?

JACK

[*Pleasantly.*] Never. Not even of any kind.

GWENDOLEN

I am afraid it is quite clear, Cecily, that

neither of us is engaged to be married to anyone.

CECILY

It is not a very pleasant position for a young girl suddenly to find herself in. Is it?

GWENDOLEN

Let us go into the house. They will hardly venture to come after us there.

CECILY

No, men are so cowardly, aren't they?

[*They retire into the house with scornful looks.*]

JACK

This ghastly state of things is what you call Bunburying, I suppose?

ALGERNON

Yes, and a perfectly wonderful Bunbury it is. The most wonderful Bunbury I have ever had in my life.

JACK

Well, you've no right whatsoever to Bunbury here.

ALGERNON

That is absurd. One has a right to Bunbury anywhere one chooses. Every serious Bunburyist knows that.

JACK

Serious Bunburyist! Good heavens!

ALGERNON

Well, one must be serious about something, if one wants to have any amusement in life. I happen to be serious about Bunburying. What on earth you are serious about I haven't got the remotest idea. About everything, I should fancy. You have such an absolutely trivial nature.

JACK

Well, the only small satisfaction I have in the whole of this wretched business is that your friend Bunbury is quite exploded. You won't be able to run down to the country quite so often as you used to do, dear Algy. And a very good thing too.

ALGERNON

Your brother is a little off colour, isn't he, dear Jack? You won't be able to disappear to

London quite so frequently as your wicked custom was. And not a bad thing either.

JACK

As for your conduct towards Miss Cardew, I must say that your taking in a sweet, simple, innocent girl like that is quite inexcusable. To say nothing of the fact that she is my ward.

ALGERNON

I can see no possible defence at all for your deceiving a brilliant, clever, thoroughly experienced young lady like Miss Fairfax. To say nothing of the fact that she is my cousin.

JACK

I wanted to be engaged to Gwendolen, that is all. I love her.

ALGERNON

Well, I simply wanted to be engaged to Cecily. I adore her.

JACK

There is certainly no chance of your marrying Miss Cardew.

ALGERNON

I don't think there is much likelihood, Jack, of you and Miss Fairfax being united.

JACK

Well, that is no business of yours.

ALGERNON

If it was my business, I wouldn't talk about it. [*Begins to eat muffins.*] It is very vulgar to talk about one's business. Only people like stockbrokers do that, and then merely at dinner-parties.

JACK

How you can sit there, calmly eating muffins when we are in this horrible trouble, I can't make out. You seem to me to be perfectly heartless.

ALGERNON

Well, I can't eat muffins in an agitated manner. The butter would probably get on my cuffs. One should always eat muffins quite calmly. It is the only way to eat them.

JACK

I say it's perfectly heartless your eating muffins at all, under the circumstances.

ALGERNON

When I am in trouble, eating is the only thing that consoles me. Indeed, when I am in really great trouble, as anyone who knows me intimately will tell you, I refuse everything except food and drink. At the present moment I am eating muffins because I am unhappy. Besides, I am particularly fond of muffins. [*Rising.*]

JACK

[*Rising.*] Well, that is no reason why you should eat them all in that greedy way. [*Takes muffins from Algernon.*]

ALGERNON

[*Offering tea-cake.*] I wish you would have tea-cake instead. I don't like tea-cake.

JACK

Good heavens! I suppose a man may eat his own muffins in his own garden.

ALGERNON

But you have just said it was perfectly heartless to eat muffins.

JACK

I said it was perfectly heartless of you, under the circumstances. That is a very different thing.

ALGERNON

That may be. But the muffins are the same. [*He seizes the muffin-dish from Jack.*]

JACK

Algy, I wish to goodness you would go.

ALGERNON

You can't possibly ask me to go without having some dinner. It's absurd. I never go without my dinner. No one ever does, except vegetarians and people like that. Besides I have just made arrangements with Dr. Chasuble to be christened at a quarter to six under the name of Ernest.

JACK

My dear fellow, the sooner you give up that nonsense the better. I made arrangements this

morning with Dr. Chasuble to be christened myself at 5:30, and I naturally will take the name of Ernest. Gwendolen would wish it. We can't both be christened Ernest. It's absurd. Besides, I have a perfect right to be christened if I like. There is no evidence at all that I ever have been christened by anybody. I should think it extremely probable I never was, and so does Dr. Chasuble. It is entirely different in your case. You have been christened already.

ALGERNON

Yes, but I have not been christened for years.

JACK

Yes, but you have been christened. That is the important thing.

ALGERNON

Quite so. So I know my constitution can stand it. If you are not quite sure about your ever having been christened, I must say I think it rather dangerous your venturing on it now. It might make you very unwell. You can hardly have forgotten that someone very closely connected with you was very nearly carried off this week in Paris by a severe chill.

JACK

Yes, but you said yourself that a severe chill was not hereditary.

ALGERNON

It usen't to be, I know—but I daresay it is now. Science is always making wonderful improvements in things.

JACK

[*Picking up the muffin-dish.*] Oh, that is nonsense; you are always talking nonsense.

ALGERNON

Jack, you are at the muffins again! I wish you wouldn't. There are only two left. [*Takes them.*] I told you I was particularly fond of muffins.

JACK

But I hate tea-cake.

ALGERNON

Why on earth then do you allow tea-cake to be served up for your guests? What ideas you have of hospitality!

JACK

Algernon! I have already told you to go. I don't want you here. Why don't you go!

ALGERNON

I haven't quite finished my tea yet! and there is still one muffin left. [*Jack groans, and sinks into a chair. Algernon still continues eating.*]

ACT-DROP.

THIRD ACT.

SCENE—*Morning-room at the Manor House.*

[*Gwendolen and Cecily are at the window, looking out into the garden.*]

GWENDOLEN

The fact that they did not follow us at once into the house, as anyone else would have done, seems to me to show that they have some sense of shame left.

CECILY

They have been eating muffins. That looks like repentance.

GWENDOLEN

[*After a pause.*] They don't seem to notice us at all. Couldn't you cough?

CECILY

But I haven't got a cough.

GWENDOLEN

They're looking at us. What effrontery!

CECILY

They're approaching. That's very forward of them.

GWENDOLEN

Let us preserve a dignified silence.

CECILY

Certainly. It's the only thing to do now.

[*Enter Jack followed by Algernon. They whistle some dreadful popular air from a British Opera.*]

GWENDOLEN

This dignified silence seems to produce an unpleasant effect.

CECILY

A most distasteful one.

GWENDOLEN

But we will not be the first to speak.

CECILY

Certainly not.

GWENDOLEN

Mr. Worthing, I have something very particular to ask you. Much depends on your reply.

CECILY

Gwendolen, your common sense is invaluable. Mr. Moncrieff, kindly answer me the following question. Why did you pretend to be my guardian's brother?

ALGERNON

In order that I might have an opportunity of meeting you.

CECILY

[*To Gwendolen.*] That certainly seems a satisfactory explanation, does it not?

GWENDOLEN

Yes, dear, if you can believe him.

CECILY

I don't. But that does not affect the wonderful beauty of his answer.

GWENDOLEN

True. In matters of grave importance, style,

not sincerity is the vital thing. Mr. Worthing, what explanation can you offer to me for pretending to have a brother? Was it in order that you might have an opportunity of coming up to town to see me as often as possible?

JACK

Can you doubt it, Miss Fairfax?

GWENDOLEN

I have the gravest doubts upon the subject. But I intend to crush them. This is not the moment for German scepticism. [*Moving to Cecily.*] Their explanations appear to be quite satisfactory, especially Mr. Worthing's. That seems to me to have the stamp of truth upon it.

CECILY

I am more than content with what Mr. Moncrieff said. His voice alone inspires one with absolute credulity.

GWENDOLEN

Then you think we should forgive them?

CECILY

Yes. I mean no.

GWENDOLEN

True! I had forgotten. There are principles at stake that one cannot surrender. Which of us should tell them? The task is not a pleasant one.

CECILY

Could we not both speak at the same time?

GWENDOLEN

An excellent idea! I nearly always speak at the same time as other people. Will you take the time from me?

CECILY

Certainly. [*Gwendolen beats time with uplifted finger.*]

GWENDOLEN AND CECILY

[*Speaking together.*] Your Christian names are still an insuperable barrier. That is all!

JACK AND ALGERNON

[*Speaking together.*] Our Christian names! Is that all? But we are going to be christened this afternoon.

GWENDOLEN

[*To Jack.*] For my sake you are prepared to do this terrible thing?

JACK

I am.

CECILY

[*To Algernon.*] To please me you are ready to face this fearful ordeal?

ALGERNON

I am!

GWENDOLEN

How absurd to talk of the equality of the sexes! Where questions of self-sacrifice are concerned, men are infinitely beyond us.

JACK

We are. [*Clasps hands with Algernon.*]

CECILY

They have moments of physical courage of which we women know absolutely nothing.

GWENDOLEN

[*To Jack.*[Darling!

ALGERNON

[*To Cecily.*] Darling. [*They fall into each other's arms.*]

[*Enter Merriman. When he enters he coughs loudly, seeing the situation.*]

MERRIMAN

Ahem! Ahem! Lady Bracknell!

JACK

Good heavens!

[*Enter Lady Bracknell. The couples separate in alarm. Exit Merriman.*]

LADY BRACKNELL

Gwendolen! What does this mean?

GWENDOLEN

Merely that I am engaged to be married to Mr. Worthing, mamma.

LADY BRACKNELL

Come here. Sit down. Sit down immediately. Hesitation of any kind is a sign of mental decay in the young, of physical weakness in the old. [*Turns to Jack.*] Apprised, sir, of my daughter's sudden flight by her trusty maid, whose

confidence I purchased by means of a small coin, I followed her at once by a luggage train. Her unhappy father is, I am glad to say, under the impression that she is attending a more than usually lengthy lecture by the University Extension Scheme on the Influence of a permanent income on Thought. I do not propose to undeceive him. Indeed I have never undeceived him on any question. I would consider it wrong. But of course, you will clearly understand that all communication between yourself and my daughter must cease immediately from this moment. On this point, as indeed on all points, I am firm.

JACK

I am engaged to be married to Gwendolen, Lady Bracknell!

LADY BRACKNELL

You are nothing of the kind, sir. And now, as regards Algernon! . . . Algernon!

ALGERNON

Yes, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL

May I ask if it is in this house that your invalid friend Mr. Bunbury resides?

ALGERNON

[*Stammering.*] Oh! No! Bunbury doesn't live here. Bunbury is somewhere else at present. In fact, Bunbury is dead.

LADY BRACKNELL

Dead! When did Mr. Bunbury die? His death must have been extremely sudden.

ALGERNON

[*Airily.*] Oh! I killed Bunbury this afternoon. I mean poor Bunbury died this afternoon.

LADY BRACKNELL

What did he die of?

ALGERNON

Bunbury? Oh, he was quite exploded.

LADY BRACKNELL

Exploded! Was he the victim of a revolutionary outrage. I was not aware that Mr.

Bunbury was interested in social legislation. If so, he is well punished for his morbidity.

ALGERNON

My dear Aunt Augusta, I mean he was found out! The doctors found out that Bunbury could not live, that is what I mean—so Bunbury died.

LADY BRACKNELL

He seems to have had great confidence in the opinion of his physicians. I am glad, however, that he made up his mind at the last to some definite course of action, and acted under proper medical advice. And now that we have finally got rid of this Mr. Bunbury, may I ask, Mr. Worthing, who is that young person whose hand my nephew Algernon is now holding in what seems to me a peculiarly unnecessary manner?

JACK

That lady is Miss Cecily Cardew, my ward. [*Lady Bracknell bows coldly to Cecily.*]

ALGERNON

I am engaged to be married to Cecily, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL

I beg your pardon?

CECILY

Mr. Moncrieff and I are engaged to be married, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL

[*With a shiver, crossing to the sofa and sitting down.*] I do not know whether there is anything peculiarly exciting in the air of this particular part of Hertfordshire, but the number of engagements that go on seems to me considerably above the proper average that statistics have laid down for our guidance. I think some preliminary enquiry on my part would not be out of place. Mr. Worthing, is Miss Cardew at all connected with any of the larger railway stations in London? I merely desire information. Until yesterday I had no idea that there were any families or persons whose origin was a Terminus. [*Jack looks perfectly furious, but restrains himself.*]

JACK

[*In a clear, cold voice.*] Miss Cardew is the granddaughter of the late Mr. Thomas Cardew

of 149, Belgrave Square, S.W.; Gervase Park, Dorking, Surrey; and the Sporran, Fifeshire, N.B.

LADY BRACKNELL

That sounds not unsatisfactory. Three addresses always inspire confidence, even in tradesmen. But what proof have I of their authenticity?

JACK

I have carefully preserved the Court Guides of the period. They are open to your inspection, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL

[*Grimly.*] I have known strange errors in that publication.

JACK

Miss Cardew's family solicitors are Messrs. Markby, Markby, and Markby.

LADY BRACKNELL

Markby, Markby, and Markby? A firm of the very highest position in their profession. Indeed I am told that one of the Mr. Markbys is occa-

sionally to be seen at dinner parties. So far I am satisfied.

JACK

[*Very irritably.*] How extremely kind of you, Lady Bracknell! I have also in my possession, you will be pleased to hear, certificates of Miss Cardew's birth, baptism, whooping cough, registration, vaccination, confirmation, and the measles; both the German and the English variety.

LADY BRACKNELL

Ah! A life crowded with incident, I see; though perhaps somewhat too exciting for a young girl. I am not myself in favour of premature experiences. [*Rises, looks at her watch.*] Gwendolen! the time approaches for our departure. We have not a moment to lose. As a matter of form, Mr. Worthing, I had better ask you if Miss Cardew has any little fortune?

JACK

Oh! about a hundred and thirty thousand pounds in the Funds. That is all. Good-bye, Lady Bracknell. So pleased to have seen you.

LADY BRACKNELL

[*Sitting down again.*] A moment, Mr. Worthing. A hundred and thirty thousand pounds! And in the Funds! Miss Cardew seems to me a most attractive young lady, now that I look at her. Few girls of the present day have any really solid qualities, any of the qualities that last, and improve with time. We live, I regret to say, in an age of surfaces. [*To Cecily.*] Come over here, dear. [*Cecily goes across.*] Pretty child! your dress is sadly simple, and your hair seems almost as Nature might have left it. But we can soon alter all that. A thoroughly experienced French maid produces a really marvellous result in a very brief space of time. I remember recommending one to young Lady Lancing, and after three months her own husband did not know her.

JACK

[*Aside.*] And after six months nobody knew her.

LADY BRACKNELL

[*Glares at Jack for a few moments. Then bends, with a practised smile, to Cecily.*] Kindly turn round, sweet child. [*Cecily turns com-*

pletely round.] No, the side view is what I want. [*Cecily presents her profile.*] Yes, quite as I expected. There are distinct social possibilities in your profile. The two weak points in our age are its want of principle and its want of profile. The chin a little higher, dear. Style largely depends on the way the chin is worn. They are worn very high, just at present. Algernon!

ALGERNON

Yes, Aunt Augusta!

LADY BRACKNELL

There are distinct social possibilities in Miss Cardew's profile.

ALGERNON

Cecily is the sweetest, dearest, prettiest girl in the whole world. And I don't care twopence about social possibilities.

LADY BRACKNELL

Never speak disrespectfully of Society, Algernon. Only people who can't get into it do that. [*To Cecily.*] Dear child, of course you know that Algernon has nothing but his debts to depend

upon. But I do not approve of mercenary marriages. When I married Lord Bracknell I had no fortune of any kind. But I never dreamed for a moment of allowing that to stand in my way. Well, I suppose I must give my consent.

ALGERNON

Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL

Cecily, you may kiss me!

CECILY

[*Kisses her.*] Thank you, Lady Bracknell.

LADY BRACKNELL

You may also address me as Aunt Augusta for the future.

CECILY

Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL

The marriage, I think, had better take place quite soon.

ALGERNON

Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

CECILY

Thank you, Aunt Augusta.

LADY BRACKNELL

To speak frankly, I am not in favour of long engagements. They give people the opportunity of finding out each other's character before marriage, which I think is never advisable.

JACK

I beg your pardon for interrupting you, Lady Bracknell, but this engagement is quite out of the question. I am Miss Cardew's guardian, and she cannot marry without my consent until she comes of age. That consent I absolutely decline to give.

LADY BRACKNELL

Upon what grounds may I ask? Algernon is an extremely, I may almost say an ostentatiously, eligible young man. He has nothing, but he looks everything. What more can one desire?

JACK

It pains me very much to have to speak frankly to you, Lady Bracknell, about your nephew, but the fact is that I do not approve at

all of his moral character. I suspect him of being untruthful. [*Algernon and Cecily look at him in indignant amazement.*]

LADY BRACKNELL

Untruthful! My nephew Algernon? Impossible! He is an Oxonian.

JACK

I fear there can be no possible doubt about the matter. This afternoon, during my temporary absence in London on an important question of romance, he obtained admission to my house by means of the false pretense of being my brother. Under an assumed name he drank, I've just been informed by my butler, an entire pint bottle of my Perrier-Jouet, Brut, '89; a wine I was specially reserving for myself. Continuing his disgraceful deception, he succeeded in the course of the afternoon in alienating the affections of my only ward. He subsequently stayed to tea, and devoured every single muffin. And what makes his conduct all the more heartless is, that he was perfectly well aware from the first that I have no brother, that I never had a brother, and that I don't intend to have a brother, not

even of any kind. I distinctly told him so myself yesterday afternoon.

LADY BRACKNELL

Ahem! Mr. Worthing, after careful consideration I have decided entirely to overlook my nephew's conduct to you.

JACK

That is very generous of you, Lady Bracknell. My own decision, however, is unalterable. I decline to give my consent.

LADY BRACKNELL

[*To Cecily.*] Come here, sweet child. [*Cecily goes over.*] How old are you, dear?

CECILY

Well, I am really only eighteen, but I always admit to twenty when I go to evening parties.

LADY BRACKNELL

You are perfectly right in making some slight alteration. Indeed, no woman should ever be quite accurate about her age. It looks so calculating. . . . [*In a meditative manner.*] Eighteen, but admitting to twenty at evening parties.

Well, it will not be very long before you are of age and free from the restraints of tutelage. So I don't think your guardian's consent is, after all, a matter of any importance.

JACK

Pray excuse me, Lady Bracknell, for interrupting you again, but it is only fair to tell you that according to the terms of her grandfather's will Miss Cardew does not come legally of age till she is thirty-five.

LADY BRACKNELL

That does not seem to me to be a grave objection. Thirty-five is a very attractive age. London society is full of women of the very highest birth who have, of their own free choice, remained thirty-five for years. Lady Dumbleton is an instance in point. To my own knowledge she has been thirty-five ever since she arrived at the age of forty, which was many years ago now. I see no reason why our dear Cecily should not be even still more attractive at the age you mention than she is at present. There will be a large accumulation of property.

CECILY

Algy, could you wait for me till I was thirty-five?

ALGERNON

Of course I could, Cecily. You know I could.

CECILY

Yes, I felt it instinctively, but I couldn't wait all that time. I hate waiting even five minutes for anybody. It always makes me rather cross. I am not punctual myself, I know, but I do like punctuality in others, and waiting, even to be married, is quite out of the question.

ALGERNON

Then what is to be done, Cecily?

CECILY

I don't know, Mr. Moncrieff.

LADY BRACKNELL

My dear Mr. Worthing, as Miss Cardew states positively that she cannot wait till she is thirty-five—a remark which I am bound to say seems to me to show a somewhat impatient nature—I would beg of you to reconsider your decision.

JACK

But my dear Lady Bracknell, the matter is entirely in your own hands. The moment you consent to my marriage with Gwendolen, I will most gladly allow your nephew to form an alliance with my ward.

LADY BRACKNELL

[*Rising and drawing herself up.*] You must be quite aware that what you propose is out of the question.

JACK

Then a passionate celibacy is all that any of us can look forward to.

LADY BRACKNELL

That is not the destiny I propose for Gwendolen. Algernon, of course, can choose for himself. [*Pulls out her watch.*] Come, dear; [*Gwendolen rises*] we have already missed five, if not six, trains. To miss any more might expose us to comment on the platform.

[*Enter Dr. Chasuble.*]

CHASUBLE

Everything is quite ready for the christenings.

LADY BRACKNELL

The christenings, sir! Is not that somewhat premature?

CHASUBLE

[*Looking rather puzzled, and pointing to Jack and Algernon.*] Both these gentlemen have expressed a desire for immediate baptism.

LADY BRACKNELL

At their age? The idea is grotesque and irreligious! Algernon, I forbid you to be baptised. I will not hear of such excesses. Lord Bracknell would be highly displeased if he learned that that was the way in which you wasted your time and money.

CHASUBLE

Am I to understand then that there are to be no christenings at all this afternoon?

JACK

I don't think that, as things are now, it would be of much practical value to either of us, Dr. Chasuble.

CHASUBLE

I am grieved to hear such sentiments from

you, Mr. Worthing. They savour of the heretical views of the Anabaptists, views that I have completely refuted in four of my unpublished sermons. However, as your present mood seems to be one peculiarly secular, I will return to the church at once. Indeed, I have just been informed by the pew-opener that for the last hour and a half Miss Prism has been waiting for me in the vestry.

LADY BRACKNELL

[*Starting.*] Miss Prism! Did I hear you mention a Miss Prism?

CHASUBLE

Yes, Lady Bracknell. I am on my way to join her.

LADY BRACKNELL

Pray allow me to detain you for a moment. This matter may prove to be one of vital importance to Lord Bracknell and myself. Is this Miss Prism a female of repellent aspect, remotely connected with education?

CHASUBLE

[*Somewhat indignantly.*] She is the most

cultivated of ladies, and the very picture of respectability.

LADY BRACKNELL

It is obviously the same person. May I ask what position she holds in your household?

CHASUBLE

[*Severely.*] I am a celibate, madam.

JACK

[*Interposing.*] Miss Prism, Lady Bracknell, has been for the last three years Miss Cardew's esteemed governess and valued companion.

LADY BRACKNELL

In spite of what I hear of her, I must see her at once. Let her be sent for.

CHASUBLE

[*Looking off.*] She approaches; she is nigh.

[*Enter Miss Prism hurriedly.*]

MISS PRISM

I was told you expected me in the vestry, dear Canon. I have been waiting for you there for an hour and three quarters. [*Catches sight of Lady Bracknell who has fixed her with a stony glare. Miss Prism grows pale and quails. She looks anxiously round as if desirous to escape.*]

LADY BRACKNELL

[*In a severe, judicial voice.*] Prism! [*Miss Prism bows her head in shame.*] Come here, Prism! [*Miss Prism approaches in a humble manner.*] Prism! Where is that baby? [*General consternation. The Canon starts back in horror. Algernon and Jack pretend to be anxious to shield Cecily and Gwendolen from hearing the details of a terrible public scandal.*] Twenty-eight years ago, Prism, you left Lord Bracknell's house, Number 104, Upper Grosvenor Street, in charge of a perambulator that contained a baby, of the male sex. You never returned. A few weeks later, through the elaborate investigations of the Metropolitan police, the perambulator was discovered at midnight, standing by itself in a remote corner of Bayswater. It contained the manuscript of a three-volume novel of more than usually revolting sentimentality. [*Miss Prism starts in involuntary indignation.*] But the baby was not there! [*Everyone looks at Miss Prism.*] Prism! Where is that baby? [*A pause.*]

MISS PRISM

Lady Bracknell, I admit with shame that I do

not know. I only wish I did. The plain facts of the case are these. On the morning of the day you mention, a day that is for ever branded on my memory, I prepared as usual to take the baby out in its perambulator. I had also with me a somewhat old, but capacious hand-bag, in which I had intended to place the manuscript of a work of fiction that I had written during my few unoccupied hours. In a moment of mental abstraction, for which I never can forgive myself, I deposited the manuscript in the bassinette, and placed the baby in the hand-bag.

JACK

[*Who has been listening attentively.*] But where did you deposit the hand-bag?

MISS PRISM

Do not ask me, Mr. Worthing.

JACK

Miss Prism, this is a matter of no small importance to me. I insist on knowing where you deposited the hand-bag that contained that infant.

MISS PRISM

I left it in the cloak room of one of the larger railway stations in London.

JACK

What railway station?

MISS PRISM

[*Quite crushed.*] Victoria. The Brighton line. [*Sinks into a chair.*]

JACK

I must retire to my room for a moment. Gwendolen, wait here for me.

GWENDOLEN

If you are not too long, I will wait here for you all my life.

[*Exit Jack in great excitement.*]

CHASUBLE

What do you think this means, Lady Bracknell?

LADY BRACKNELL

I dare not even suspect, Dr. Chasuble. I need hardly tell you that in families of high position

strange coincidences are not supposed to occur. They are hardly considered the thing.

[*Noises heard overhead as if someone was throwing trunks about. Everyone looks up.*]

CECILY

Uncle Jack seems strangely agitated.

CHASUBLE

Your guardian has a very emotional nature.

LADY BRACKNELL

This noise is extremely unpleasant. It sounds as if he was having an argument. I dislike arguments of any kind. They are always vulgar, and often convincing.

CHASUBLE

[*Looking up.*] It has stopped now. [*The noise is redoubled.*]

LADY BRACKNELL

I wish he would arrive at some conclusion.

GWENDOLEN

This suspense is terrible. I hope it will last.

[*Enter Jack with a hand-bag of black leather in his hand.*]

JACK

[*Rushing over to Miss Prism.*] Is this the hand-bag, Miss Prism? Examine it carefully before you speak. The happiness of more than one life depends on your answer.

MISS PRISM

[*Calmly.*] It seems to be mine. Yes, here is the injury it received through the upsetting of a Gower Street omnibus in younger and happier days. Here is the stain on the lining caused by the explosion of a temperance beverage, an incident that occurred at Leamington. And here, on the lock, are my initials. I had forgotten that in an extravagant mood I had had them placed there. The bag is undoubtedly mine. I am delighted to have it so unexpectedly restored to me. It has been a great inconvenience being without it all these years.

JACK

[*In a pathetic voice.*] Miss Prism, more is restored to you than this hand-bag. I was the baby you placed in it.

MISS PRISM

[*Amazed.*] You?

JACK

[*Embracing her.*] Yes . . . mother!

MISS PRISM

[*Recoiling in indignant astonishment.*] Mr. Worthing! I am unmarried!

JACK

Unmarried! I do not deny that is a serious blow. But after all, who has the right to cast a stone against one who has suffered? Cannot repentance wipe out an act of folly? Why should there be one law for men, and another for women? Mother, I forgive you. [*Tries to embrace her again.*]

MISS PRISM

[*Still more indignant.*] Mr. Worthing, there is some error. [*Pointing to Lady Bracknell.*] There is the lady who can tell you who you really are.

JACK

[*After a pause.*] Lady Bracknell, I hate to seem inquisitive, but would you kindly inform me who I am?

LADY BRACKNELL

I am afraid that the news I have to give you will not altogether please you. You are the son of my poor sister, Mrs. Moncrieff, and consequently Algernon's elder brother.

JACK

Algy's elder brother! Then I have a brother after all. I knew I had a brother! I always said I had a brother! Cecily,—how could you have ever doubted that I had a brother? [*Seizes hold of Algernon.*] Dr. Chasuble, my unfortunate brother. Miss Prism, my unfortunate brother. Gwendolen, my unfortunate brother. Algy, you young scoundrel, you will have to treat me with more respect in the future. You have never behaved to me like a brother in all your life.

ALGERNON

Well, not till to-day, old boy, I admit. I did my best, however, though I was out of practice. [*Shakes hands.*]

GWENDOLEN

[*To Jack.*] My own! But what own are you?

What is your Christian name, now that you have become someone else?

JACK

Good heavens! . . . I had quite forgotten that point. Your decision on the subject of my name is irrevocable, I suppose?

GWENDOLEN

I never change, except in my affections.

CECILY

What a noble nature you have, Gwendolen!

JACK

Then the question had better be cleared up at once. Aunt Augusta, a moment. At the time when Miss Prism left me in the hand-bag, had I been christened already?

LADY BRACKNELL

Every luxury that money could buy, including christening, had been lavished on you by your fond and doting parents.

JACK

Then I was christened! That is settled. Now, what name was I given? Let me know the worst.

LADY BRACKNELL

Being the eldest son you were naturally christened after your father.

JACK

[*Irritably.*] Yes, but what was my father's Christian name?

LADY BRACKNELL

[*Meditatively.*] I cannot at the present moment recall what the General's Christian name was. But I have no doubt he had one. He was eccentric, I admit. But only in later years. And that was the result of the Indian climate, and marriage, and indigestion, and other things of that kind.

JACK

Algy! Can't you recollect what our father's Christian name was?

ALGERNON

My dear boy, we were never even on speaking terms. He died before I was a year old.

JACK

His name would appear in the Army Lists of the period, I suppose, Aunt Augusta?

LADY BRACKNELL

The General was essentially a man of peace, except in his domestic life. But I have no doubt his name would appear in any military directory.

JACK

The Army Lists of the last forty years are here. These delightful records should have been my constant study. [*Rushes to bookcase and tears the books out.*] M. Generals . . . Mallam, Maxbohm, Magley, what ghastly names they have —Markby, Migsby, Mobbs, Moncrieff! Lieutenant 1840, Captain, Lieutenant-Colonel, Colonel, General 1869, Christian names, Ernest John. [*Puts book very quietly down and speaks quite calmly.*] I always told you, Gwendolen, my name was Ernest, didn't I? Well, it is Ernest after all. I mean it naturally is Ernest.

LADY BRACKNELL

Yes, I remember now that the General was called Ernest. I knew I had some particular reason for disliking the name.

GWENDOLEN

Ernest! My own Ernest! I felt from the first that you could have no other name!

JACK

Gwendolen, it is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me?

GWENDOLEN

I can. For I feel that you are sure to change.

JACK

My own one!

CHASUBLE

[*To Miss Prism.*] Lætitia! [*Embraces her.*]

MISS PRISM

[*Enthusiastically.*] Frederick! At last!

ALGERNON

Cecily! [*Embraces her.*] At last!

JACK

Gwendolen! [*Embraces her.*] At last!

LADY BRACKNELL

My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of triviality.

JACK

On the contrary, Aunt Augusta, I've now realized for the first time in my life the vital Importance of Being Earnest.

CURTAIN.

An Ideal Husband

A Play

To
Frank Harris
A Slight Tribute to
His Power and Distinction
As an Artist
His Chivalry and Nobility
As a Friend

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY.

THE EARL OF CAVERSHAM, K.G.

VISCOUNT GORING, his Son

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN, Bart., Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

VICOMTE DE NANJAC, Attaché at the French Embassy in London

MR. MONTFORD

MASON, Butler to Sir Robert Chiltern

PHIPPS, Lord Goring's Servant

HAROLD } footmen
JAMES }

LADY CHILTERN

LADY MARKBY

THE COUNTESS OF BASILDON

MRS. MARCHMONT

MISS MABEL CHILTERN, Sir Robert Chiltern's Sister

MRS. CHEVELEY

THE SCENES OF THE PLAY.

ACT I *The Octagon Room in Sir Robert Chiltern's House in Grosvenor Square.*

ACT II *Morning-room in Sir Robert Chiltern's House.*

ACT III *The Library of Lord Goring's House in Curzon Street.*

ACT IV *Same as Act II.*

Time

The Present.

Place

London.

The Action of the Play is completed within twenty-four hours.

FIRST ACT

SCENE—*The octagon room at Sir Robert Chiltern's house in Grosvenor Square.*

[*The room is brilliantly lighted and full of guests. At the top of the staircase stands Lady Chiltern, a woman of grave Greek beauty, about twenty-seven years of age. She receives the guests as they come up. Over the well of the staircase hangs a great chandelier with wax lights, which illumine a large eighteenth-century French tapestry—representing the Triumph of Love, from a design by Boucher—that is stretched on the staircase wall. On the right is the entrance to the music-room. The sound of a string quartette is faintly heard. The entrance on the left leads to other reception-rooms. Mrs. Marchmont and Lady Basildon, two very pretty women, are seated together on a Louis Seize sofa. They are types of exquisite*

fragility. Their affectation of manner has a delicate charm. Watteau would have loved to paint them.]

MRS. MARCHMONT

Going on to the Hartlocks' to-night, Margaret?

LADY BASILDON

I suppose so. Are you?

MRS. MARCHMONT

Yes. Horribly tedious parties they give, don't they?

LADY BASILDON

Horribly tedious! Never know why I go. Never know why I go anywhere.

MRS. MARCHMONT

I come here to be educated.

LADY BASILDON

Ah! I hate being educated.

MRS. MARCHMONT

So do I. It puts one almost on a level with the commercial classes, doesn't it? But dear Gertrude Chiltern is always telling me that I

should have some serious purpose in life. So I come here to try to find one.

LADY BASILDON

[*Looking round through her lorgnette.*] I don't see anybody here to-night whom one could possibly call a serious purpose. The man who took me in to dinner talked to me about his wife the whole time.

MRS. MARCHMONT

How very trivial of him!

LADY BASILDON

Terribly trivial! What did your man talk about?

MRS. MARCHMONT

About myself.

LADY BASILDON

[*Languidly.*] And were you interested?

MRS. MARCHMONT

[*Shaking her head.*] Not in the smallest degree.

LADY BASILDON

What martyrs we are, dear Margaret!

MRS. MARCHMONT

[*Rising.*] And how well it becomes us, Olivia!

[*They rise and go towards the music-room. The Vicomte de Nanjac, a young attaché known for his neckties and his Anglomania, approaches with a low bow, and enters into conversation.*]

MASON

[*Announcing guests from the top of the staircase.*] Mr. and Lady Jane Barford. Lord Caversham.

[*Enter Lord Caversham, an old gentleman of seventy, wearing the riband and star of the Garter. A fine Whig type. Rather like a portrait by Lawrence.*]

LORD CAVERSHAM

Good evening, Lady Chiltern! Has my good-for-nothing young son been here?

LADY CHILTERN

[*Smiling.*] I don't think Lord Goring has arrived yet.

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Coming up to Lord Caversham.*] Why do you call Lord Goring good-for-nothing?

[*Mabel Chiltern is a perfect example of the English type of prettiness, the apple-blossom type. She has all the fragrance and freedom of a flower. There is ripple after ripple of sunlight in her hair, and the little mouth, with its parted lips, is expectant, like the mouth of a child. She has the fascinating tyranny of youth, and the astonishing courage of innocence. To sane people she is not reminiscent of any work of art. But she is really like a Tanagra statuette, and would be rather annoyed if she were told so.*]

LORD CAVERSHAM

Because he leads such an idle life.

MABEL CHILTERN

How can you say such a thing? Why, he rides in the Row at ten o'clock in the morning, goes to the Opera three times a week, changes his clothes at least five times a day, and dines out every night of the season. You don't call that leading an idle life, do you?

LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Looking at her with a kindly twinkle in his eyes.*] You are a very charming young lady!

MABEL CHILTERN

How sweet of you to say that, Lord Caversham. Do come to us more often. You know we are always at home on Wednesdays, and you look so well with your star!

LORD CAVERSHAM

Never go anywhere now. Sick of London Society. Shouldn't mind being introduced to my own tailor; he always votes on the right side. But object strongly to being sent down to dinner with my wife's milliner. Never could stand Lady Caversham's bonnets!

LADY CHILTERN

Oh, I love London Society! I think it has immensely improved. It is entirely composed now of beautiful idiots and brilliant lunatics. Just what Society should be.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Hum! Which is Goring? Beautiful idiot, or the other thing?

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Gravely.*] I have been obliged for the present to put Lord Goring into a class quite by himself. But he is developing charmingly.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Into what?

MABEL CHILTERN

[*With a little curtsey.*] I hope to let you know very soon, Lord Caversham!

MASON

[*Announcing guests.*] Lady Markby. Mrs. Cheveley.

[*Enter Lady Markby and Mrs. Cheveley. Lady Markby is a pleasant, kindly, popular woman, with gray hair à la marquise and good lace. Mrs. Cheveley, who accompanies her, is tall and rather slight. Lips very thin and highly coloured, a line of scarlet on a pallid face. Venetian red hair, aquiline nose, and long throat. Rouge accentuates the natural paleness of her complexion. Gray-green eyes that move restlessly. She is in heliotrope, with diamonds. She looks rather like an orchid, and makes great demands on one's curiosity. A work of art, on the whole, but showing the influence of too many schools.*]

LADY MARKBY

Good evening, dear Gertrude! So kind of you to let me bring my friend, Mrs. Cheveley.

Two such charming women should know each other!

LADY CHILTERN

[*Advances towards Mrs. Cheveley with a sweet smile. Then suddenly stops, and bows rather distantly.*] I think Mrs. Cheveley and I have met before. I did not know she had married a second time.

LADY MARKBY

[*Genially.*] Ah, nowadays people marry as often as they can, don't they? It is most fashionable. [*To Duchess of Maryborough.*] Dear Duchess, and how is the Duke? Brain still weak, I suppose? Well, that is only to be expected, is it not? His good father was just the same. There is nothing like race, is there?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Playing with her fan.*] But have we really met before, Lady Chiltern? I can't remember where. I have been out of England for so long.

LADY CHILTERN

We were at school together, Mrs. Cheveley.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Superciliously.*] Indeed? I have forgotten all about my schooldays. I have a vague impression that they were detestable.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Coldly.*] I am not surprised!

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*In her sweetest manner.*] Do you know, I am quite looking forward to meeting your clever husband, Lady Chiltern. Since he has been at the Foreign Office, he has been so much talked of in Vienna. They actually succeed in spelling his name right in the newspapers. That in itself is fame, on the continent.

LADY CHILTERN

I hardly think there will be much in common between you and my husband, Mrs. Cheveley. [*Moves away.*]

VICOMTE DE NANJAC

Ah! chère Madame, quelle surprise! I have not seen you since Berlin!

MRS. CHEVELEY

Not since Berlin, Vicomte. Five years ago!

VICOMTE DE NANJAC

And you are younger and more beautiful than ever. How do you manage it?

MRS. CHEVELEY

By making it a rule only to talk to perfectly charming people like yourself.

VICOMTE DE NANJAC

Ah! you flatter me. You butter me, as they say here.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Do they say that here? How dreadful of them!

VICOMTE DE NANJAC

Yes, they have a wonderful language. It should be more widely known.

[*Sir Robert Chiltern enters. A man of forty, but looking somewhat younger. Clean-shaven, with finely-cut features, dark-haired and dark-eyed. A personality of mark. Not popular—few personalities are. But intensely admired by the few, and deeply respected by the many. The note of his manner that of perfect distinction, with a slight touch of pride. One feels that he is conscious of the success he has made*

in life. A nervous temperament, with a tired look. The firmly-chiselled mouth and chin contrast strikingly with the romantic expression in the deep-set eyes. The variance is suggestive of an almost complete separation of passion and intellect, as though thought and emotion were each isolated in its own sphere through some violence of will-power. There is nervousness in the nostrils, and in the pale, thin, pointed hands. It would be inaccurate to call him picturesque. Picturesqueness cannot survive the House of Commons. But Vandyck would have liked to have painted his head.]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Good evening, Lady Markby! I hope you have brought Sir John with you?

LADY MARKBY

Oh! I have brought a much more charming person than Sir John. Sir John's temper since he has taken seriously to politics has become quite unbearable. Really, now that the House of Commons is trying to become useful, it does a great deal of harm.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I hope not, Lady Markby. At any rate we

do our best to waste the public time, don't we? But who is this charming person you have been kind enough to bring to us?

LADY MARKBY

Her name is Mrs. Cheveley! One of the Dorsetshire Cheveleys, I suppose. But I really don't know. Families are so mixed nowadays. Indeed, as a rule, everybody turns out to be somebody else.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Mrs. Cheveley? I seem to know the name.

LADY MARKBY

She has just arrived from Vienna.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Ah! yes. I think I know whom you mean.

LADY MARKBY

Oh! she goes everywhere there, and has such pleasant scandals about all her friends. I really must go to Vienna next winter. I hope there is a good chef at the Embassy.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

If there is not, the Ambassador will certainly

have to be recalled. Pray point out Mrs. Cheveley to me. I should like to see her.

LADY MARKBY

Let me introduce you. [*To Mrs. Cheveley.*] My dear, Sir Robert is dying to know you.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Bowing.*] Everyone is dying to know the brilliant Mrs. Cheveley. Our attachés at Vienna write to us about nothing else.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Thank you, Sir Robert. An acquaintance that begins with a compliment is sure to develop into a real friendship. It starts in the right manner. And I find that I know Lady Chiltern already.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Really?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Yes. She has just reminded me that we were at school together. I remember it perfectly now. She always got the good conduct prize. I have a distinct recollection of Lady Chiltern always getting the good conduct prize!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Smiling.*] And what prizes did you get, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY

My prizes came a little later on in life. I don't think any of them were for good conduct. I forget!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I am sure they were for something charming!

MRS. CHEVELEY

I don't know that women are always rewarded for being charming. I think they are usually punished for it! Certainly, more women grow old nowadays through the faithfulness of their admirers than through anything else! At least that is the only way I can account for the terribly haggard look of most of your pretty women in London!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

What an appalling philosophy that sounds! To attempt to classify you, Mrs. Cheveley, would be an impertinence. But may I ask, at heart, are you an optimist or a pessimist? Those

seem to be the only two fashionable religions left to us nowadays.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh, I'm neither. Optimism begins in a broad grin, and Pessimism ends with blue spectacles. Besides, they are both of them merely poses.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

You prefer to be natural?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Sometimes. But it is such a very difficult pose to keep up.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

What would those modern psychological novelists, of whom we hear so much, say to such a theory as that?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Ah! the strength of women comes from the fact that psychology cannot explain us. Men can be analyzed, women . . . merely adored.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

You think science cannot grapple with the problem of women?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Science can never grapple with the irrational. That is why it has no future before it, in this world.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

And women represent the irrational.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Well-dressed women do.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*With a polite bow.*] I fear I could hardly agree with you there. But do sit down. And now tell me, what makes you leave your brilliant Vienna for our gloomy London—or perhaps the question is indiscreet?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Questions are never indiscreet. Answers sometimes are.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Well, at any rate, may I know if it is politics or pleasure?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Politics are my only pleasure. You see nowadays it is not fashionable to flirt till one is

forty, or to be romantic till one is forty-five, so we poor women who are under thirty, or say we are, have nothing open to us but politics or philanthropy. And philanthropy seems to me to have become simply the refuge of people who wish to annoy their fellow-creatures. I prefer politics. I think they are more . . . becoming!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

A political life is a noble career!

MRS. CHEVELEY

Sometimes. And sometimes it is a clever game, Sir Robert. And sometimes it is a great nuisance.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Which do you find it?

MRS. CHEVELEY

I? A combination of all three. [*Drops her fan.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Picks up fan.*] Allow me!

MRS. CHEVELEY

Thanks.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

But you have not told me yet what makes you honour London so suddenly. Our season is almost over.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh! I don't care about the London season! It is too matrimonial. People are either hunting for husbands, or hiding from them. I wanted to meet you. It is quite true. You know what a woman's curiosity is. Almost as great as a man's! I wanted immensely to meet you, and . . . to ask you to do something for me.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I hope it is not a little thing, Mrs. Cheveley. I find that little things are so very difficult to do.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*After a moment's reflection.*] No, I don't think it is quite a little thing.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I am so glad. Do tell me what it is.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Later on. [*Rises.*] And now may I walk through your beautiful house? I hear your pictures are charming. Poor Baron Arnheim—you remember the Baron?—used to tell me you had some wonderful Corots.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*With an almost imperceptible start.*] Did you know Baron Arnheim well?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Smiling.*] Intimately. Did you?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

At one time.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Wonderful man, wasn't he?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*After a pause.*] He was very remarkable, in many ways.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I often think it such a pity he never wrote his memoirs. They would have been most interesting.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Yes: he knew men and cities well, like the old Greek.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Without the dreadful disadvantage of having a Penelope waiting at home for him.

MASON

Lord Goring.

[*Enter Lord Goring. Thirty-four, but always says he is younger. A well-bred, expressionless face. He is clever, but would not like to be thought so. A flawless dandy, he would be annoyed if he were considered romantic. He plays with life, and is on perfectly good terms with the world. He is fond of being misunderstood. It gives him a post of vantage.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Good evening, my dear Arthur! Mrs. Cheveley, allow me to introduce to you Lord Goring, the idlest man in London.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I have met Lord Goring before.

LORD GORING

[*Bowing.*] I did not think you would remember me, Mrs. Cheveley.

MRS. CHEVELEY

My memory is under admirable control. And are you still a bachelor?

LORD GORING

I . . . believe so.

MRS. CHEVELEY

How very romantic!

LORD GORING

Oh! I am not at all romantic. I am not old enough. I leave romance to my seniors.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Lord Goring is the result of Boodle's Club, Mrs. Cheveley.

MRS. CHEVELEY

He reflects every credit on the institution.

LORD GORING

May I ask are you staying in London long?

MRS. CHEVELEY

That depends partly on the weather, partly on the cooking, and partly on Sir Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

You are not going to plunge us into a European war, I hope?

MRS. CHEVELEY

There is no danger, at present!

[*She nods to Lord Goring, with a look of amusement in her eyes, and goes out with Sir Robert Chiltern. Lord Goring saunters over to Mabel Chiltern.*]

MABEL CHILTERN

You are very late!

LORD GORING

Have you missed me?

MABEL CHILTERN

Awfully!

LORD GORING

Then I am sorry I did not stay away longer. I like being missed.

MABEL CHILTERN

How very selfish of you!

LORD GORING

I am very selfish.

MABEL CHILTERN

You are always telling me of your bad qualities, Lord Goring.

LORD GORING

I have only told you half of them as yet, Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN

Are the others very bad?

LORD GORING

Quite dreadful! When I think of them at night I go to sleep at once.

MABEL CHILTERN

Well, I delight in your bad qualities. I wouldn't have you part with one of them.

LORD GORING

How very nice of you! But then you are always nice. By the way, I want to ask you a question, Miss Mabel. Who brought Mrs.

Cheveley here? That woman in heliotrope, who has just gone out of the room with your brother?

MABEL CHILTERN

Oh, I think Lady Markby brought her. Why do you ask?

LORD GORING

I hadn't seen her for years, that is all.

MABEL CHILTERN

What an absurd reason!

LORD GORING

All reasons are absurd.

MABEL CHILTERN

What sort of woman is she?

LORD GORING

Oh! a genius in the daytime and a beauty at night!

MABEL CHILTERN

I dislike her already.

LORD GORING

That shows your admirable good taste.

VICOMTE DE NANJAC

[*Approaching.*] Ah, the English young lady is the dragon of good taste, is she not? Quite the dragon of good taste.

LORD GORING

So the newspapers are always telling us.

VICOMTE DE NANJAC

I read all your English newspapers. I find them so amusing.

LORD GORING

Then, my dear Nanjac, you must certainly read between the lines.

VICOMTE DE NANJAC

I should like to, but my professor objects. [*To Mabel Chiltern.*] May I have the pleasure of escorting you to the music-room, Mademoiselle?

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Looking very disappointed.*] Delighted, Vicomte, quite delighted! [*Turning to Lord Goring.*] Aren't you coming to the music-room?

LORD GORING

Not if there is any music going on, Miss Mabel.

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Severely.*] The music is in German. You would not understand it.

[*Goes out with the Vicomte de Nanjac. Lord Caversham comes up to his son.*]

LORD CAVERSHAM

Well, sir! what are you doing here? Wasting your life as usual! You should be in bed, sir. You keep too late hours! I heard of you the other night at Lady Rufford's dancing till four o'clock in the morning!

LORD GORING

Only a quarter to four, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Can't make out how you stand London Society. The thing has gone to the dogs, a lot of damned nobodies talking about nothing.

LORD GORING

I love talking about nothing, father. It is the only thing I know anything about.

LORD CAVERSHAM

You seem to me to be living entirely for pleasure.

LORD GORING

What else is there to live for, father? Nothing ages like happiness.

LORD CAVERSHAM

You are heartless, sir, very heartless!

LORD GORING

I hope not, father. Good evening, Lady Basildon!

LADY BASILDON

[*Arching two pretty eyebrows.*] Are you here? I had no idea you ever came to political parties!

LORD GORING

I adore political parties. They are the only place left to us where people don't talk politics.

LADY BASILDON

I delight in talking politics. I talk them all day long. But I can't bear listening to them. I don't know how the unfortunate men in the House stand these long debates.

LORD GORING

By never listening.

LADY BASILDON

Really?

LORD GORING

[*In his most serious manner.*] Of course. You see, it is a very dangerous thing to listen. If one listens one may be convinced; and a man who allows himself to be convinced by an argument is a thoroughly unreasonable person.

LADY BASILDON

Ah! that accounts for so much in men that I have never understood, and so much in women that their husbands never appreciate in them!

MRS. MARCHMONT

[*With a sigh.*] Our husbands never appreciate anything in us. We have to go to others for that!

LADY BASILDON

[*Emphatically.*] Yes, always to others, have we not?

LORD GORING

[*Smiling.*] And those are the views of the

two ladies who are known to have the most admirable husbands in London.

MRS. MARCHMONT

That is exactly what we can't stand. My Reginald is quite hopelessly faultless. He is really unendurably so, at times! There is not the smallest element of excitement in knowing him.

LORD GORING

How terrible! Really, the thing should be more widely known!

LADY BASILDON

Basildon is quite as bad; he is as domestic as if he was a bachelor.

MRS. MARCHMONT

[*Pressing Lady Basildon's hand.*] My poor Olivia! We have married perfect husbands, and we are well punished for it.

LORD GORING

I should have thought it was the husbands who were punished.

MRS. MARCHMONT

[*Drawing herself up.*] Oh, dear, no! They

are as happy as possible! And as for trusting us, it is tragic how much they trust us.

LADY BASILDON

Perfectly tragic!

LORD GORING

Or comic, Lady Basildon?

LADY BASILDON

Certainly not comic, Lord Goring. How unkind of you to suggest such a thing!

MRS. MARCHMONT

I am afraid Lord Goring is in the camp of the enemy, as usual. I saw him talking to that Mrs. Cheveley when he came in.

LORD GORING

Handsome woman, Mrs. Cheveley!

LADY BASILDON

[*Stiffly.*] Please don't praise other women in our presence. You might wait for us to do that!

LORD GORING

I did wait.

MRS. MARCHMONT

Well, we are not going to praise her. I hear she went to the Opera on Monday night, and told Tommy Rufford at supper that, as far as she could see, London Society was entirely made up of dowdies and dandies.

LORD GORING

She is quite right, too. The men are all dowdies and the women are all dandies, aren't they? [*After a pause.*] Oh! do you really think that is what Mrs. Cheveley meant?

MRS. MARCHMONT

Of course. And a very sensible remark for Mrs. Cheveley to make, too.

[*Enter Mabel Chiltern. She joins the group.*]

MABEL CHILTERN

Why are you talking about Mrs. Cheveley? Everybody is talking about Mrs. Cheveley! Lord Goring says—what did you say, Lord Goring, about Mrs. Cheveley? Oh! I remember, that she was a genius in the daytime and a beauty at night.

LADY BASILDON

What a horrid combination! So very unnatural!

MRS. MARCHMONT

[*In her most dreamy manner.*] I like looking at geniuses, and listening to beautiful people.

LORD GORING

Ah! that is morbid of you, Mrs. Marchmont!

MRS. MARCHMONT

[*Brightening to a look of real pleasure.*] I am so glad to hear you say that. Marchmont and I have been married for seven years, and he has never once told me that I was morbid. Men are so painfully unobservant!

LADY BASILDON

[*Turning to her.*] I have always said, dear Margaret, that you were the most morbid person in London.

MRS. MARCHMONT

Ah! but you are always sympathetic, Olivia!

MABEL CHILTERN

Is it morbid to have a desire for food? I have

a great desire for food. Lord Goring, will you give me some supper?

LORD GORING

With pleasure, Miss Mabel. [*Moves away with her.*]

MABEL CHILTERN

How horrid you have been! You have never talked to me the whole evening!

LORD GORING

How could I? You went away with the child-diplomatist.

MABEL CHILTERN

You might have followed us. Pursuit would have been only polite. I don't think I like you at all this evening!

LORD GORING

I like you immensely.

MABEL CHILTERN

Well, I wish you'd show it in a more marked way! [*They go downstairs.*]

MRS. MARCHMONT

Olivia, I have a curious feeling of absolute

faintness. I think I should like some supper very much. I know I should like some supper.

LADY BASILDON

I am positively dying for supper, Margaret!

MRS. MARCHMONT

Men are so horribly selfish, they never think of these things.

LADY BASILDON

Men are grossly material, grossly material! [*The Vicomte de Nanjac enters from the music-room with some other guests. After having carefully examined all the people present, he approaches Lady Basildon.*]

VICOMTE DE NANJAC

May I have the honour of taking you down to supper, Comtesse?

LADY BASILDON

[*Coldly.*] I never take supper, thank you, Vicomte. [*The Vicomte is about to retire. Lady Basildon, seeing this, rises at once and takes his arm.*] But I will come down with you with pleasure.

VICOMTE DE NANJAC

I am so fond of eating! I am very English in all my tastes.

LADY BASILDON

You look quite English, Vicomte, quite English.

[*They pass out. Mr. Montford, a perfectly-groomed young dandy, approaches Mrs. Marchmont.*]

MR. MONTFORD

Like some supper, Mrs. Marchmont?

MRS. MARCHMONT

[*Languidly.*] Thank you, Mr. Montford, I never touch supper. [*Rises hastily and takes his arm.*] But I will sit beside you, and watch you.

MR. MONTFORD

I don't know that I like being watched when I am eating!

MRS. MARCHMONT

Then I will watch some one else.

MR. MONTFORD

I don't know that I should like that either.

MRS. MARCHMONT

[*Severely.*] Pray, Mr. Montford, do not make these painful scenes of jealousy in public!

[*They go downstairs with the other guests, passing Sir Robert Chiltern and Mrs. Cheveley, who now enter.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

And are you going to any of our country houses before you leave England, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh, no! I can't stand your English house-parties. In England people actually try to be brilliant at breakfast. That is so dreadful of them! Only dull people are brilliant at breakfast. And then the family skeleton is always reading family prayers. My stay in England really depends on you, Sir Robert. [*Sits down on the sofa.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Taking a seat beside her.*] Seriously?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Quite seriously. I want to talk to you about a great political and financial scheme, about this Argentine Canal Company, in fact.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

What a tedious, practical subject for you to talk about, Mrs. Cheveley!

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh, I like tedious, practical subjects. What I don't like are tedious, practical people. There is a wide difference. Besides, you are interested, I know, in International Canal schemes. You were Lord Radley's secretary, weren't you, when the Government bought the Suez Canal shares?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Yes. But the Suez Canal was a very great and splendid undertaking. It gave us our direct route to India. It had imperial value. It was necessary that we should have control. This Argentine scheme is a commonplace Stock Exchange swindle.

MRS. CHEVELEY

A speculation, Sir Robert! A brilliant, daring speculation.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Believe me, Mrs. Cheveley, it is a swindle. Let us call things by their proper names. It makes matters simpler. We have all the information about it at the Foreign Office. In fact, I sent out a special Commission to inquire into the matter privately, and they report that the works are hardly begun, and as for the money already subscribed, no one seems to know what has become of it. The whole thing is a second Panama, and with not a quarter of the chance of success that miserable affair ever had. I hope you have not invested in it. I am sure you are far too clever to have done that.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I have invested very largely in it.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Who could have advised you to do such a foolish thing?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Your old friend—and mine.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Who?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Baron Arnheim.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Frowning.*] Ah! yes. I remember hearing, at the time of his death, that he had been mixed up in the whole affair.

MRS. CHEVELEY

It was his last romance. His last but one, to do him justice.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Rising.*] But you have not seen my Corots yet. They are in the music-room. Corots seem to go with music, don't they? May I show them to you?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Shaking her head.*] I am not in a mood to-night for silver twilights, or rose-pink dawns. I want to talk business. [*Motions to him with her fan to sit down again beside her.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I fear I have no advice to give you, Mrs. Cheveley, except to interest yourself in something less dangerous. The success of the Canal depends, of course, on the attitude of England, and I am going to lay the report of the Commissioners before the House to-morrow night.

MRS. CHEVELEY

That you must not do. In your own interests, Sir Robert, to say nothing of mine, you must not do that.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Looking at her in wonder.*] In my own interests? My dear Mrs. Cheveley, what do you mean? [*Sits down beside her.*]

MRS. CHEVELEY

Sir Robert, I will be quite frank with you. I want you to withdraw the report that you had intended to lay before the House, on the ground that you have reasons to believe that the Commissioners have been prejudiced or misinformed, or something. Then I want you to say a few words to the effect that the Government is going to reconsider the question, and

that you have reason to believe that the Canal, if completed, will be of great international value. You know the sort of things ministers say in cases of this kind. A few ordinary platitudes will do. In modern life nothing produces such an effect as a good platitude. It makes the whole world kin. Will you do that for me?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Mrs Cheveley, you cannot be serious in making me such a proposition!

MRS. CHEVELEY

I am quite serious.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Coldly.*] Pray allow me to believe that you are not!

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Speaking with great deliberation and emphasis.*] Ah! but I am. And, if you do what I ask you, I . . . will pay you very handsomely!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Pay me!

MRS. CHEVELEY

Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I am afraid I don't quite understand what you mean.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Leaning back on the sofa and looking at him.*] How very disappointing! And I have come all the way from Vienna in order that you should thoroughly understand me.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I fear I don't.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*In her most nonchalant manner.*] My dear Sir Robert, you are a man of the world, and you have your price, I suppose. Everybody has nowadays. The drawback is that most people are so dreadfully expensive. I know I am. I hope you will be more reasonable in your terms.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Rises indignantly.*] If you will allow me, I will call your carriage for you. You have lived so long abroad, Mrs. Cheveley, that you

seem to be unable to realize that you are talking to an English gentleman.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Detains him by touching his arm with her fan, and keeping it there while she is talking.*] I realize that I am talking to a man who laid the foundation of his fortune by selling to a Stock Exchange speculator a Cabinet secret.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Biting his lip.*] What do you mean?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Rising and facing him.*] I mean that I know the real origin of your wealth and your career, and I have got your letter, too.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

What letter?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Contemptuously.*] The letter you wrote to Baron Arnheim, when you were Lord Radley's secretary, telling the Baron to buy Suez Canal shares—a letter written three days before the Government announced its own purchase.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Hoarsely.*] It is not true.

MRS. CHEVELEY

You thought that letter had been destroyed. How foolish of you! It is in my possession.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

The affair to which you allude was no more than a speculation. The House of Commons had not yet passed the bill; it might have been rejected.

MRS. CHEVELEY

It was a swindle, Sir Robert. Let us call things by their proper names. It makes everything simpler. And now I am going to sell you that letter, and the price I ask for it is your public support of the Argentine scheme. You made your own fortune out of one canal. You must help me and my friends to make our fortunes out of another!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

It is infamous, what you propose—infamous!

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh, no! This is the game of life as we all have to play it, Sir Robert, sooner or later.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I cannot do what you ask me.

MRS. CHEVELEY

You mean you cannot help doing it. You know you are standing on the edge of a precipice. And it is not for you to make terms. It is for you to accept them. Suppose you refuse——

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

What then?

MRS. CHEVELEY

My dear Sir Robert, what then! You are ruined, that is all! Remember to what a point your Puritanism in England has brought you. In old days nobody pretended to be a bit better than his neighbours. In fact, to be a bit better than one's neighbour was considered excessively vulgar and middle-class. Nowadays, with our modern mania for morality, everyone has to pose as a paragon of purity, incorruptibility,

and all the other seven deadly virtues—and what is the result? You all go over like nine-pins—one after the other. Not a year passes in England without somebody disappearing. Scandals used to lend charm, or at least interest, to a man—now they crush him. And yours is a very nasty scandal. You couldn't survive it. If it were known that as a young man. secretary to a great and important minister, you sold a Cabinet secret for a large sum of money, and that that was the origin of your wealth and career, you would be hounded out of public life, you would disappear completely. And after all, Sir Robert, why should you sacrifice your entire future rather than deal diplomatically with your enemy? For the moment I am your enemy. I admit it! And I am much stronger than you are. The big battalions are on my side. You have a splendid position, but it is your splendid position that makes you so vulnerable. You can't defend it. And I am in attack. Of course I have not talked morality to you. You must admit in fairness that I have spared you that. Years ago you did a clever, unscrupulous thing; it turned out a great success. You owe to it your fortune and position. And

now you have got to pay for it. Sooner or later we all have to pay for what we do. You have to pay now. Before I leave you to-night, you have got to promise me to suppress your report, and to speak in the House in favour of this scheme.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

What you ask is impossible.

MRS. CHEVELEY

You must make it possible. You are going to make it possible. Sir Robert, you know what your English newspapers are like. Suppose that when I leave this house I drive down to some newspaper office, and give them this scandal and the proofs of it! Think of their loathsome joy, of the delight they would have in dragging you down, of the mud and mire they would plunge you in. Think of the hypocrite with his greasy smile penning his leading article, and arranging the foulness of the public placard.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Stop! You want me to withdraw the report and to make a short speech stating that I believe there are possibilities in the scheme?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Sitting down on the sofa.*] Those are my terms.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*In a low voice.*] I will give you any sum of money you want.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Even you are not rich enough, Sir Robert, to buy back your past. No man is.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I will not do what you ask me. I will not.

MRS. CHEVELEY

You have to. If you don't . . . [*Rises from the sofa.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Bewildered and unnerved.*] Wait a moment! What did you propose? You said that you would give me back my letter, didn't you?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Yes. That is agreed. I will be in the Ladies' Gallery to-morrow night at half-past eleven. If by that time—and you will have had heaps of opportunity—you have made an announcement to the House in the terms I wish, I shall hand

you back your letter with the prettiest thanks, and the best, or at any rate the most suitable, compliment I can think of. I intend to play quite fairly with you. One should always play fairly . . . when one has the winning cards. The Baron taught me that . . . amongst other things.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

You must let me have time to consider your proposal.

MRS. CHEVELEY

No; you must settle now!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Give me a week—three days!

MRS. CHEVELEY

Impossible! I have got to telegraph to Vienna to-night.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

My God! what brought you into my life?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Circumstances. [*Moves towards the door.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Don't go. I consent. The report shall be withdrawn. I will arrange for a question to be put to me on the subject.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Thank you. I knew we should come to an amicable agreement. I understood your nature from the first. I analyzed you, though you did not adore me. And now you can get my carriage for me, Sir Robert. I see the people coming up from supper, and Englishmen always get romantic after a meal, and that bores me dreadfully.

[*Exit Sir Robert Chiltern.*]

[*Enter Guests, Lady Chiltern, Lady Markby, Lord Caversham, Lady Basildon, Mrs. Marchmont, Vicomte de Nanjac, Mr. Montford.*]

LADY MARKBY

Well, dear Mrs. Cheveley, I hope you have enjoyed yourself. Sir Robert is very entertaining, is he not?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Most entertaining! I have enjoyed my talk with him immensely.

LADY MARKBY

He has had a very interesting and brilliant career. And he has married a most admirable wife. Lady Chiltern is a woman of the very highest principles, I am glad to say. I am a little too old now, myself, to trouble about setting a good example, but I always admire people who do. And Lady Chiltern has a very ennobling effect on life, though her dinner-parties are rather dull sometimes. But one can't have everything, can one? And now I must go, dear. Shall I call for you to-morrow?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Thanks.

LADY MARKBY

We might drive in the Park at five. Everything looks so fresh in the Park now!

MRS. CHEVELEY

Except the people!

LADY MARKBY

Perhaps the people are a little jaded. I have often observed that the Season as it goes on produces a kind of softening of the brain. How-

ever, I think anything is better than high intellectual pressure. That is the most unbecoming thing there is. It makes the noses of the young girls so particularly large. And there is nothing so difficult to marry as a large nose, men don't like them. Good-night, dear! [*To Lady Chiltern.*] Good-night, Gertrude! [*Goes out on Lord Caversham's arm.*]

MRS. CHEVELEY

What a charming house you have, Lady Chiltern! I have spent a delightful evening. It has been so interesting getting to know your husband.

LADY CHILTERN

Why did you wish to meet my husband, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh, I will tell you. I wanted to interest him in this Argentine Canal scheme, of which I dare say you have heard. And I found him most susceptible—susceptible to reason, I mean. A rare thing in a man. I converted him in ten minutes. He is going to make a speech in the House to-morrow night in favour of the idea.

We must go to the Ladies' Gallery and hear him! It will be a great occasion!

LADY CHILTERN

There must be some mistake. That scheme could never have my husband's support.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh, I assure you it's all settled. I don't regret my tedious journey from Vienna now. It has been a great success. But, of course, for the next twenty-four hours the whole thing is a dead secret.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Gently.*] A secret? Between whom?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*With a flash of amusement in her eyes.*] Between your husband and myself.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Entering.*] Your carriage is here, Mrs. Cheveley!

MRS. CHEVELEY

Thanks! Good evening, Lady Chiltern!

Good-night, Lord Goring! I am at Claridge's. Don't you think you might leave a card?

LORD GORING

If you wish it, Mrs. Cheveley!

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh, don't be so solemn about it, or I shall be obliged to leave a card on you. In England I suppose that would be hardly considered *en règle*. Abroad, we are more civilized. Will you see me down, Sir Robert? Now that we have both the same interests at heart we shall be great friends, I hope!

[*Sails out on Sir Robert Chiltern's arm. Lady Chiltern goes to the top of the staircase and looks down at them as they descend. Her expression is troubled. After a little time she is joined by some of the guests, and passes with them into another reception-room.*]

MABEL CHILTERN

What a horrid woman!

LORD GORING

You should go to bed, Miss Mabel.

MABEL CHILTERN

Lord Goring!

LORD GORING

My father told me to go to bed an hour ago. I don't see why I shouldn't give you the same advice. I always pass on good advice. It is the only thing to do with it. It is never of any use to oneself.

MABEL CHILTERN

Lord Goring, you are always ordering me out of the room. I think it most courageous of you. Especially as I am not going to bed for hours. [*Goes over to the sofa.*] You can come and sit down if you like, and talk about anything in the world, except the Royal Academy, Mrs. Cheveley, or novels in the Scotch dialect. They are not improving subjects. [*Catches sight of something that is lying on the sofa half-hidden by the cushion.*] What is this? Some one has dropped a diamond brooch! Quite beautiful, isn't it? [*Shows it to him.*] I wish it was mine, but Gertrude won't let me wear anything but pearls, and I am thoroughly sick of pearls. They make me look so plain, so good

and so intellectual. I wonder whom the brooch belongs to.

LORD GORING

I wonder who dropped it.

MABEL CHILTERN

It is a beautiful brooch.

LORD GORING

It is a handsome bracelet.

MABEL CHILTERN

It isn't a bracelet. It's a brooch.

LORD GORING

It can be used as a bracelet. [*Takes it from her, and, pulling out a green letter-case, puts the ornament carefully in it, and replaces the whole thing in his breast-pocket with the most perfect sangfroid.*]

MABEL CHILTERN

What are you doing?

LORD GORING

Miss Mabel, I am going to make a rather strange request to you.

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Eagerly.*] Oh, pray do! I have been waiting for it all the evening.

LORD GORING

[*Is a little taken aback, but recovers himself.*] Don't mention to anybody that I have taken charge of this brooch. Should anyone write and claim it, let me know at once.

MABEL CHILTERN

That is a strange request.

LORD GORING

Well, you see I gave this brooch to somebody once, years ago.

MABEL CHILTERN

You did?

LORD GORING

Yes.

[*Lady Chiltern enters alone. The other guests have gone.*]

MABEL CHILTERN

Then I shall certainly bid you good-night. Good-night, Gertrude! [*Exit.*]

LADY CHILTERN

Good-night, dear! [*To Lord Goring.*] You saw whom Lady Markby brought here to-night.

LORD GORING

Yes. It was an unpleasant surprise. What did she come here for?

LADY CHILTERN

Apparently to try and lure Robert to uphold some fraudulent scheme in which she is interested. The Argentine Canal, in fact.

LORD GORING

She has mistaken her man, hasn't she?

LADY CHILTERN

She is incapable of understanding an upright nature like my husband's!

LORD GORING

Yes. I should fancy she came to grief if she tried to get Robert into her toils. It is extraordinary what astounding mistakes clever women make.

LADY CHILTERN

I don't call women of that kind clever. I call them stupid!

LORD GORING

Same thing often. Good-night, Lady Chiltern!

LADY CHILTERN

Good-night!

[*Enter Sir Robert Chiltern.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

My dear Arthur, you are not going? Do stop a little!

LORD GORING

Afraid I can't, thanks. I have promised to look in at the Hartlocks. I believe they have got a mauve Hungarian band that plays mauve Hungarian music. See you soon. Good-bye!

[*Exit.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

How beautiful you look to-night, Gertrude!

LADY CHILTERN

Robert, it is not true, is it? You are not going to lend your support to this Argentine speculation? You couldn't!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Starting.*] Who told you I intended to do so?

LADY CHILTERN

That woman who has just gone out, Mrs. Cheveley, as she calls herself now. She seemed to taunt me with it. Robert, I know this woman. You don't. We were at school together. She was untruthful, dishonest, an evil influence on everyone whose trust or friendship she could win. I hated, I despised her. She stole things, she was a thief. She was sent away for being a thief. Why do you let her influence you?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Gertrude, what you tell me may be true, but it happened many years ago. It is best forgotten! Mrs. Cheveley may have changed since then. No one should be entirely judged by their past.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Sadly.*] One's past is what one is. It is the only way by which people should be judged.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

That is a hard saying, Gertrude!

LADY CHILTERN

It is a true saying, Robert. And what did she mean by boasting that she had got you to lend your support, your name to a thing I have heard you describe as the most dishonest and fraudulent scheme there has ever been in political life?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Biting his lip.*] I was mistaken in the view I took. We all may make mistakes.

LADY CHILTERN

But you told me yesterday that you had received the report from the Commission, and that it entirely condemned the whole thing.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Walking up and down.*] I have reasons now to believe that the Commission was prejudiced, or, at any rate, misinformed. Besides, Gertrude, public and private life are different things. They have different laws and move on different lines.

LADY CHILTERN

They should both represent man at his highest. I see no difference between them.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Stopping.*] In the present case, on a matter of practical politics, I have changed my mind. That is all.

LADY CHILTERN

All!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Sternly.*] Yes!

LADY CHILTERN

Robert! Oh! it is horrible that I should have to ask you such a question—Robert, are you telling me the whole truth?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Why do you ask me such a question?

LADY CHILTERN

[*After a pause.*] Why do you not answer it?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Sitting down.*] Gertrude, truth is a very complex thing, and politics is a very complex business. There are wheels within wheels. One may be under certain obligations to people that one must pay. Sooner or later in political life one has to compromise. Everyone does.

LADY CHILTERN

Compromise? Robert, why do you talk so differently to-night from the way I have always heard you talk? Why are you changed?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I am not changed. But circumstances alter things.

LADY CHILTERN

Circumstances should never alter principles.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

But if I told you——

LADY CHILTERN

What?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

That it was necessary, vitally necessary.

LADY CHILTERN

It can never be necessary to do what is not honourable. Or if it be necessary, then what is it that I have loved! But it is not, Robert; tell me it is not. Why should it be? What gain would you get? Money? We have no need of that! And money that comes from a tainted

source is a degradation. Power? But power is nothing in itself. It is power to do good that is fine—that, and that only. What is it, then? Robert, tell me why you are going to do this dishonourable thing!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Gertrude, you have no right to use that word. I told you it was a question of rational compromise. It is no more than that.

LADY CHILTERN

Robert, that is all very well for other men, for men who treat life simply as a sordid speculation; but not for you, Robert, not for you. You are different. All your life you have stood apart from others. You have never let the world soil you. To the world, as to myself, you have been an ideal always. Oh! be that ideal still. That great inheritance throw not away—that tower of ivory do not destroy. Robert, men can love what is beneath them—things unworthy, stained, dishonoured. We women worship when we love; and when we lose our worship, we lose everything. Oh! don't kill my love for you. don't kill that!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Gertrude!

LADY CHILTERN

I know that there are men with horrible secrets in their lives—men who have done some shameful thing, and who in some critical moment have to pay for it, by doing some other act of shame—oh! don't tell me you are such as they are! Robert, is there in your life any secret dishonour or disgrace? Tell me, tell me at once, that——

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

That what?

LADY CHILTERN

[*Speaking very slowly.*] That our lives may drift apart.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Drift apart?

LADY CHILTERN

That they may be entirely separate. It would be better for us both.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Gertrude, there is nothing in my past life that you might not know.

LADY CHILTERN

I was sure of it, Robert. I was sure of it. But why did you say those dreadful things, things so unlike your real self? Don't let us ever talk about the subject again. You will write, won't you, to Mrs. Cheveley, and tell her that you cannot support this scandalous scheme of hers? If you have given her any promise you must take it back, that is all!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Must I write and tell her that?

LADY CHILTERN

Surely, Robert! What else is there to do?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I might see her personally. It would be better.

LADY CHILTERN

You must never see her again, Robert. She is not a woman you should ever speak to. She is not worthy to talk to a man like you. No;

you must write to her at once, now, this moment, and let your letter show her that your decision is quite irrevocable!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Write this moment!

LADY CHILTERN

Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

But it is so late. It is close on twelve.

LADY CHILTERN

That makes no matter. She must know at once that she has been mistaken in you—and that you are not a man to do anything base or underhand or dishonourable. Write her, Robert. Write that you decline to support this scheme of hers, as you hold it to be a dishonest scheme. Yes—write the word dishonest. She knows what that word means. [*Sir Robert Chiltern sits down and writes a letter. His wife takes it up and reads it.*] Yes; that will do. [*Rings bell.*] And now the envelope. [*He writes the envelope slowly. Enter Mason.*] Have this letter sent at once to Claridge's Hotel. There is no answer. [*Exit Mason. Lady Chiltern*

kneels down beside her husband and puts her arms round him.] Robert, love gives one a sort of instinct to things. I feel to-night that I have saved you from something that might have been a danger to you, from something that might have made men honour you less than they do. I don't think you realize sufficiently, Robert, that you have brought into the political life of our time a nobler atmosphere, a finer attitude towards life, a freer air of purer aims and higher ideals—I know it, and for that I love you, Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Oh, love me always, Gertrude, love me always!

LADY CHILTERN

I will love you always, because you will always be worthy of love. We needs must love the highest when we see it! [*Kisses him and rises and goes out.*]

[*Sir Robert Chiltern walks up and down for a moment; then sits down and buries his face in his hands. The servant enters and begins putting out the lights. Sir Robert Chiltern looks up.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Put out the lights, Mason, put out the lights.

[*The Servant puts out the lights. The room becomes almost dark. The only light there is comes from the great chandelier that hangs over the staircase and illumes the tapestry of the Triumph of Love.*]

ACT-DROP.

SECOND ACT

SCENE—*Morning-room at Sir Robert Chiltern's house.*

[*Lord Goring, dressed in the height of fashion, is lounging in an armchair. Sir Robert Chiltern is standing in front of the fireplace. He is evidently in a state of great mental excitement and distress. As the scene progresses he paces nervously up and down the room.*]

LORD GORING

My dear Robert, it's a very awkward business, very awkward indeed. You should have told your wife the whole thing. Secrets from other people's wives are a necessary luxury in modern life. So, at least, I am always told at the club by people who are bald enough to know better. But no man should have a secret from his own wife. She invariably finds it out. Wo-

men have a wonderful instinct about things. They can discover everything except the obvious.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Arthur, I couldn't tell my wife. When could I have told her? Not last night. It would have made a life-long separation between us, and I would have lost the love of the one woman in the world I worship, of the only woman who has ever stirred love within me. Last night it would have been quite impossible. She would have turned from me in horror . . . in horror and in contempt.

LORD GORING

Is Lady Chiltern as perfect as all that?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Yes; my wife is as perfect as all that.

LORD GORING

[*Taking off his left-hand glove.*] What a pity! I beg your pardon, my dear fellow, I didn't quite mean that. But if what you tell me is true, I should like to have a serious talk about life with Lady Chiltern.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

It would be quite useless.

LORD GORING

May I try?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Yes; but nothing could make her alter her views.

LORD GORING

Well, at the worst it would simply be a psychological experiment.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

All such experiments are terribly dangerous.

LORD GORING

Everything is dangerous, my dear fellow. If it wasn't so, life wouldn't be worth living. . . . Well, I am bound to say that I think you should have told her years ago.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

When? When we were engaged? Do you think she would have married me if she had known that the origin of my fortune is such as it is, the basis of my career such as it is, and

that I had done a thing that I suppose most men would call shameful and dishonourable?

LORD GORING

[*Slowly.*] Yes; most men would call it ugly names. There is no doubt of that.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Bitterly.*] Men who every day do something of the same kind themselves. Men who, each one of them, have worse secrets in their own lives.

LORD GORING

That is the reason they are so pleased to find out other people's secrets. It distracts public attention from their own.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

And, after all, whom did I wrong by what I did? No one.

LORD GORING

[*Looking at him steadily.*] Except yourself, Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*After a pause.*] Of course I had private in-

formation about a certain transaction contemplated by the Government of the day, and I acted on it. Private information is practically the source of every large modern fortune.

LORD GORING

[*Tapping his boot with his cane.*] And public scandal invariably the result.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Pacing up and down the room.*] Arthur, do you think that what I did nearly eighteen years ago should be brought up against me now? Do you think it fair that a man's whole career should be ruined for a fault done in one's boyhood almost. I was twenty-two at the time, and I had the double misfortune of being well-born and poor, two unforgivable things nowadays. Is it fair that the folly, the sin of one's youth, if men choose to call it a sin, should wreck a life like mine, should place me in the pillory, should shatter all that I have worked for, all that I have built up? Is it fair, Arthur?

LORD GORING

Life is never fair, Robert. And perhaps it is a good thing for most of us that it is not.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Every man of ambition has to fight his century with its own weapons. What this century worships is wealth. To succeed one must achieve wealth. At all costs one must have wealth.

LORD GORING

You underrate yourself, Robert. Believe me, without wealth you could have succeeded just as well.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

When I was old, perhaps. When I had lost my passion for power, or could not use it. When I was tired, worn out, disappointed. I wanted my success when I was young. Youth is the time for success. I couldn't wait.

LORD GORING

Well, you certainly have had your success while you are still young. No one in our day has had such a brilliant success. Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs at the age of forty—that's good enough for anyone, I should think.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

And if it is all taken away from me now? If

I lose everything over a horrible scandal? If I am hounded from public life?

LORD GORING

Robert, how could you have sold yourself for money?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Excitedly.*] I did not sell myself for money. I bought success at a great price. That is all.

LORD GORING

[*Gravely.*] Yes; you certainly paid a great price for it. But what first made you think of doing such a thing?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Baron Arnheim.

LORD GORING

Damned scoundrel!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

No; he was a man of a most subtle and refined intellect. A man of culture, charm, and distinction. One of the most intellectual men I ever met.

LORD GORING

Ah! I prefer a gentlemanly fool any day. There is more to be said for stupidity than people imagine. Personally, I have a great admiration for stupidity. It is a sort of fellow-feeling, I suppose. But how did he do it? Tell me the whole thing.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Throws himself into an armchair by the writing-table.*] One night after dinner at Lord Radley's the Baron began talking about success in modern life as something that one could reduce to an absolutely definite science. With that wonderfully fascinating quiet voice of his he expounded to us the most terrible of all philosophies, the philosophy of power, preached to us the most marvellous of all gospels, the gospel of gold. I think he saw the effect he had produced on me, for some days afterward he wrote and asked me to come and see him. He was living then in Park Lane, in the house Lord Woolcomb has now. I remember so well how, with a strange smile on his pale curved lips, he led me through his wonderful picture gallery, showed me his tapestries, his enamels, his jewels, his carved ivories, made me wonder at the strange

loveliness of the luxury in which he lived; and then told me that luxury was nothing but a background, a painted scene in a play, and that power, power over other men, power over the world was the one thing worth having, the one supreme pleasure worth knowing, the one toy one never tired of, and that in our century only the rich possessed it.

LORD GORING

[*With great deliberation.*] A thoroughly shallow creed.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Rising.*] I didn't think so then. I don't think so now. Wealth has given me enormous power. It gave me at the very outset of my life freedom, and freedom is everything. You have never been poor, and never known what ambition is. You cannot understand what a wonderful chance the Baron gave me. Such a chance as few men get.

LORD GORING

Fortunately for them, if one is to judge by results. But tell me definitely, how did the Baron finally persuade you to—well, to do what you did?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

When I was going away he said to me that if I ever could give him any private information of real value he would make me a very rich man. I was dazed at the prospect he held out to me, and my ambition and my desire for power were at that time boundless. Six weeks later certain private documents passed through my hands.

LORD GORING

[*Keeping his eyes steadily fixed on the carpet.*] State documents?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Yes. [*Lord Goring sighs, then passes his hand across his forehead and looks up.*]

LORD GORING

I had no idea that you, of all men in the world, could have been so weak, Robert, as to yield to such a temptation as Baron Arnheim held out to you.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Weak? Oh, I am sick of hearing that phrase.

Sick of using it about others. Weak? Do you really think, Arthur, that it is weakness that yields to temptation? I tell you that there are terrible temptations that it requires strength, strength and courage, to yield to. To stake all one's life on a single moment, to risk everything on one throw, whether the stakes be power or pleasure, I care not—there is no weakness in that. There is a horrible, a terrible courage. I had that courage. I sat down the same afternoon and wrote Baron Arnheim the letter this woman now holds. He made three-quarters of a million over the transaction.

LORD GORING

And you?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I received from the Baron £110,000.

LORD GORING

You were worth more, Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

No; that money gave me exactly what I wanted, power over others. I went into the House immediately. The Baron advised me in finance

from time to time. Before five years I had almost trebled my fortune. Since then everything that I have touched has turned out a success. In all things connected with money I have had a luck so extraordinary that sometimes it has made me almost afraid. I remember having read somewhere, in some strange book, that when the gods wish to punish us they answer our prayers.

LORD GORING

But tell me, Robert, did you never suffer any regret for what you had done?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

No. I felt that I had fought the century with its own weapons, and won.

LORD GORING

[*Sadly.*] You thought you had won.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I thought so. [*After a long pause.*] Arthur, do you despise me for what I have told you?

LORD GORING

[*With deep feeling in his voice.*] I am very sorry for you, Robert, very sorry indeed.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I don't say that I suffered any remorse. I didn't. Not remorse in the ordinary, rather silly sense of the word. But I have paid conscience money many times. I had a wild hope that I might disarm destiny. The sum Baron Arnheim gave me I have distributed twice over in public charities since then.

LORD GORING

[*Looking up.*] In public charities? Dear me! what a lot of harm you must have done, Robert?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Oh, don't say that, Arthur; don't talk like that.

LORD GORING

Never mind what I say, Robert. I am always saying what I shouldn't say. In fact, I usually say what I really think. A great mistake nowadays. It makes one so liable to be misunderstood. As regards this dreadful business, I will help you in whatever way I can. Of course you know that.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Thank you, Arthur, thank you. But what is to be done? What can be done?

LORD GORING

[*Leaning back with his hands in his pockets.*] Well, the English can't stand a man who is always saying he is in the right, but they are very fond of a man who admits that he has been in the wrong. It is one of the best things in them. However, in your case, Robert, a confession would not do. The money, if you will allow me to say so is . . . awkward. Besides, if you did make a clean breast of the whole affair, you would never be able to talk morality again. And in England a man who can't talk morality twice a week to a large, popular, immoral audience is quite over as a serious politician. There would be nothing left for him as a profession except Botany or the Church. A confession would be of no use. It would ruin you.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

It would ruin me. Arthur, the only thing for me to do now is to fight the thing out.

LORD GORING

[*Rising from his chair.*] I was waiting for

you to say that, Robert. It is the only thing to do now. And you must begin by telling your wife the whole story.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

That I will not do.

LORD GORING

Robert, believe me, you are wrong.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I couldn't do it. It would kill her love for me. And now about this woman, this Mrs. Cheveley. How can I defend myself against her? You knew her before, Arthur, apparently.

LORD GORING

Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Did you know her well?

LORD GORING

[*Arranging his necktie.*] So little that I got engaged to be married to her once, when I was staying at the Tenbys'. The affair lasted for three days . . . nearly.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Why was it broken off?

LORD GORING

[*Airily.*] Oh, I forget. At least, it makes no matter. By the way, have you tried her with money? She used to be confoundedly fond of money.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I offered her any sum she wanted. She refused.

LORD GORING

Then the marvellous gospel of gold breaks down sometimes. The rich can't do everything, after all.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Not everything. I suppose you are right. Arthur, I feel that public disgrace is in store for me. I feel certain of it. I never knew what terror was before. I know it now. It is as if a hand of ice were laid upon one's heart. It is as if one's heart were beating itself to death in some empty hollow.

LORD GORING

[*Striking the table.*] Robert, you must fight her. You must fight her.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

But how?

LORD GORING

I can't tell you how, at present. I have not the smallest idea. But everyone has some weak point. There is some flaw in each one of us. [*Strolls over to the fireplace and looks at himself in the glass.*] My father tells me that even I have faults. Perhaps I have. I don't know.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

In defending myself against Mrs. Cheveley, I have a right to use any weapon I can find, have I not?

LORD GORING

[*Still looking in the glass.*] In your place I don't think I should have the smallest scruple in doing so. She is thoroughly well able to take care of herself.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Sits down at the table and takes a pen in his*

hand.] Well, I shall send a cipher telegram to the Embassy at Vienna, to inquire if there is anything known against her. There may be some secret scandal she might be afraid of.

LORD GORING

[*Settling his buttonhole.*] Oh, I should fancy Mrs. Cheveley is one of those very modern women of our time who find a new scandal as becoming as a new bonnet, and air them both in the Park every afternoon at five-thirty. I am sure she adores scandals, and that the sorrow of her life at present is that she can't manage to have enough of them.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Writing.*] Why do you say that?

LORD GORING

[*Turning round.*] Well, she wore far too much rouge last night, and not quite enough clothes. That is always a sign of despair in a woman.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Striking a bell.*] But it is worth while my wiring to Vienna, is it not?

LORD GORING

It is always worth while asking a question, though it is not always worth while answering one.

[*Enter Mason.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Is Mr. Trafford in his room?

MASON

Yes, Sir Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Puts what he has written into an envelope, which he then carefully closes.*] Tell him to have this sent off in cipher at once. There must not be a moment's delay.

MASON

Yes, Sir Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Oh, just give that back to me again.

[*Writes something on the envelope. Mason then goes out with the letter.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

She must have had some curious hold over Baron Arnheim. I wonder what it was.

LORD GORING

[*Smiling.*] I wonder.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I will fight her to the death, as long as my wife knows nothing.

LORD GORING

[*Strongly.*] Oh, fight in any case—in any case.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*With a gesture of despair.*] If my wife found out, there would be little left to fight for. Well, as soon as I hear from Vienna, I shall let you know the result. It is a chance, just a chance, but I believe in it. And as I fought the age with its own weapons, I will fight her with her weapons. It is only fair, and she looks like a woman with a past, doesn't she?

LORD GORING

Most pretty women do. But there is a fashion in pasts just as there is a fashion in frocks. Per-

haps Mrs. Cheveley's past is merely a slightly *décolleté one,* and they are excessively popular nowadays. Besides, my dear Robert, I should not build too high hopes on frightening Mrs. Cheveley. I should not fancy Mrs. Cheveley is a woman who would be easily frightened. She has survived all her creditors, and she shows wonderful presence of mind.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Oh! I live on hopes now. I clutch at every chance. I feel like a man on a ship that is sinking. The water is round my feet, and the very air is bitter with storm. Hush! I hear my wife's voice.

[*Enter Lady Chiltern in walking dress.*]

LADY CHILTERN

Good afternoon, Lord Goring!

LORD GORING

Good afternoon, Lady Chiltern! Have you been in the park?

LADY CHILTERN

No: I have just come from the Woman's Liberal Association, where, by the way, Robert,

your name was received with loud applause, and now I have come in to have my tea. [*To Lord Goring.*] You will wait and have some tea, won't you?

LORD GORING

I'll wait for a short time, thanks.

LADY CHILTERN

I will be back in a moment. I am only going to take my hat off.

LORD GORING

[*In his most earnest manner.*] Oh! please don't. It is so pretty. One of the prettiest hats I ever saw. I hope the Woman's Liberal Association received it with loud applause.

LADY CHILTERN

[*With a smile.*] We have much more important work to do than to look at each other's bonnets, Lord Goring.

LORD GORING

Really? What sort of work?

LADY CHILTERN

Oh! dull, useful, delightful things, Factory

Acts, Female Inspectors, the Eight Hours' Bill, the Parliamentary Franchise. . . . Everything, in fact, that you would find thoroughly uninteresting.

LORD GORING

And never bonnets?

LADY CHILTERN

[*With mock indignation.*] Never bonnets, never.

[*Lady Chiltern goes out through the door leading to her boudoir.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Takes Lord Goring's hand.*] You have been a good friend to me, Arthur, a thoroughly good friend.

LORD GORING

I don't know that I have been able to do much for you, Robert, as yet. In fact, I have not been able to do anything for you, as far as I can see. I am thoroughly disappointed with myself.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

You have enabled me to tell you the truth.

That is something. The truth has always stifled me.

LORD GORING

Ah! the truth is a thing I get rid of as soon as possible! Bad habit, by the way. Makes one very unpopular at the club. . . . with the older members. They call it being conceited. Perhaps it is.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I would to God that I had been able to tell the truth . . . to live the truth. Ah! that is the great thing in life, to live the truth. [*Sighs and goes towards the door.*] I'll see you soon again, Arthur, shan't I?

LORD GORING

Certainly. Whenever you like. I'm going to look in at the Bachelors' Ball to-night, unless I find something better to do. But I'll come round to-morrow morning. If you should want me to-night by any chance, send round a note to Curzon Street.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Thank you.

[*As he reaches the door, Lady Chiltern enters from her boudoir.*]

LADY CHILTERN

You are not going, Robert?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I have some letters to write, dear.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Going to him.*] You work too hard, Robert. You seem never to think of yourself, and you are looking so tired.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

It is nothing, dear, nothing.

[*He kisses her and goes out.*]

LADY CHILTERN

[*To Lord Goring.*] Do sit down. I am so glad you have called. I want to talk to you about . . . well, not about bonnets, or the Woman's Liberal Association. You take far too much interest in the first subject, and not nearly enough in the second.

LORD GORING

You want to talk to me about Mrs. Cheveley?

LADY CHILTERN

Yes. You have guessed it. After you left last night I found out that what she had said was really true. Of course I made Robert write her a letter at once, withdrawing his promise.

LORD GORING

So he gave me to understand.

LADY CHILTERN

To have kept it would have been the first stain on a career that has been stainless always. Robert must be above reproach. He is not like other men. He cannot afford to do what other men do. [*She looks at Lord Goring, who remains silent.*] Don't you agree with me? You are Robert's greatest friend. You are our greatest friend, Lord Goring. No one, except myself, knows Robert better than you do. He has no secrets from me, and I don't think he has any from you.

LORD GORING

He certainly has no secrets from me. At least I don't think so.

LADY CHILTERN

Then am I not right in my estimate of him? I know I am right. But speak to me frankly.

LORD GORING

[*Looking straight at her.*] Quite frankly?

LADY CHILTERN

Surely. You have nothing to conceal, have you?

LORD GORING

Nothing. But, my dear Lady Chiltern, I think, if you will allow me to say so, that in practical life——

LADY CHILTERN

[*Smiling.*] Of which you know so little, Lord Goring——

LORD GORING

Of which I know nothing by experience, though I know something by observation. I think that in practical life there is something about success, actual success, that is a little unscrupulous, something about ambition that is unscrupulous always. Once a man has set his heart and soul on getting to a certain point, if

he has to climb the crag, he climbs the crag; if he has to walk in the mire——

LADY CHILTERN

Well?

LORD GORING

He walks in the mire. Of course I am only talking generally about life.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Gravely.*] I hope so. Why do you look at me so strangely, Lord Goring?

LORD GORING

Lady Chiltern, I have sometimes thought that . . . perhaps you are a little hard in your views on life. I think that . . . often you don't make sufficient allowances. In every nature there are elements of weakness, or worse than weakness. Supposing, for instance, that—that any public man, my father, or Lord Merton, or Robert, say, had, years ago, written some foolish letter to some one . . .

LADY CHILTERN

What do you mean by a foolish letter?

LORD GORING

A letter gravely compromising one's position. I am only putting an imaginary case.

LADY CHILTERN

Robert is as incapable of doing a foolish thing as he is of doing a wrong thing.

LORD GORING

[*After a long pause.*] Nobody is incapable of doing a foolish thing. Nobody is incapable of doing a wrong thing.

LADY CHILTERN

Are you a Pessimist? What will the other dandies say? They will all have to go into mourning.

LORD GORING

[*Rising.*] No, Lady Chiltern, I am not a Pessimist. Indeed I am not sure that I quite know what Pessimism really means. All I do know is that life cannot be understood without much charity, cannot be lived without much charity. It is love, and not German philosophy, that is the true explanation of this world, whatever may be the explanation of the next. And if you

are ever in trouble, Lady Chiltern, trust me absolutely, and I will help you in every way I can. If you ever want me, come to me for my assistance, and you shall have it. Come at once to me.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Looking at him in surprise.*] Lord Goring, you are talking quite seriously. I don't think I ever heard you talk seriously before.

LORD GORING

[*Laughing.*] You must excuse me, Lady Chiltern. It won't occur again, if I can help it.

LADY CHILTERN

But I like you to be serious.

[*Enter Mabel Chiltern, in the most ravishing frock.*]

MABEL CHILTERN

Dear Gertrude, don't say such a dreadful thing to Lord Goring. Seriousness would be very unbecoming to him. Good afternoon, Lord Goring! Pray be as trivial as you can.

LORD GORING

I should like to, Miss Mabel, but I am afraid I am . . . a little out of practice this morning; and besides, I have to be going now.

MABEL CHILTERN

Just when I have come in! What dreadful manners you have! I am sure you were very badly brought up.

LORD GORING

I was.

MABEL CHILTERN

I wish I had brought you up!

LORD GORING

I am so sorry you didn't.

MABEL CHILTERN

It is too late now, I suppose?

LORD GORING

[*Smiling.*] I am not so sure.

MABEL CHILTERN

Will you ride to-morrow morning?

LORD GORING

Yes, at ten.

MABEL CHILTERN

Don't forget.

LORD GORING

Of course I shan't. By the way, Lady Chiltern, there is no list of your guests in "The Morning Post" of to-day. It has apparently been crowded out by the County Council, or the Lambeth Conference, or something equally boring. Could you let me have a list? I have a particular reason for asking you.

LADY CHILTERN

I am sure Mr. Trafford will be able to give you one.

LORD GORING

Thanks, so much.

MABEL CHILTERN

Tommy is the most useful person in London.

LORD GORING

[*Turning to her.*] And who is the most ornamental?

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Triumphantly.*] I am.

LORD GORING

How clever of you to guess it! [*Takes up his hat and cane.*] Good-bye, Lady Chiltern! You will remember what I said to you, won't you?

LADY CHILTERN

Yes; but I don't know why you said it to me.

LORD GORING

I hardly know myself. Good-bye, Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN

[*With a little move of disappointment.*] I wish you were not going. I have had four wonderful adventures this morning; four and a half, in fact. You might stop and listen to some of them.

LORD GORING

How very selfish of you to have four and a half! There won't be any left for me.

MABEL CHILTERN

I don't want you to have any. They would not be good for you.

LORD GORING

That is the first unkind thing you have ever said to me. How charmingly you said it! Ten to-morrow.

MABEL CHILTERN

Sharp.

LORD GORING

Quite sharp. But don't bring Mr. Trafford.

MABEL CHILTERN

[*With a little toss of the head.*] Of course I shan't bring Tommy Trafford. Tommy Trafford is in great disgrace.

LORD GORING

I am delighted to hear it. [*Bows and goes out.*]

MABEL CHILTERN

Gertrude, I wish you would speak to Tommy Trafford.

LADY CHILTERN

What has poor Mr. Trafford done this time? Robert says he is the best secretary he has ever had.

MABEL CHILTERN

Well, Tommy has proposed to me again. Tommy really does nothing but propose to me. He proposed to me last night in the music-room, when I was quite unprotected, as there was an elaborate trio going on. I didn't dare to make the smallest repartee, I need hardly tell you. If I had, it would have stopped the music at once. Musical people are so absurdly unreasonable. They always want one to be perfectly dumb at the very moment when one is longing to be absolutely deaf. Then he proposed to me in broad daylight this morning, in front of that dreadful statue of Achilles. Really, the things that go on in front of that work of art are quite appalling. The police should interfere. At luncheon I saw by the glare in his eye that he was going to propose again, and I just managed to check him in time by assuring him that I was a bimetallist. Fortunately I don't know what bimetallism means. And I don't believe anybody else does either. But the observation crushed Tommy for ten minutes. He looked quite shocked. And then Tommy is so annoying in the way he proposes. If he proposed at the top of his voice, I should

not mind so much. That might produce some effect on the public. But he does it in a horrid confidential way. When Tommy wants to be romantic he talks to one just like a doctor. I am very fond of Tommy, but his methods of proposing are quite out of date. I wish, Gertrude, you would speak to him, and tell him that once a week is quite often enough to propose to anyone, and that it should always be done in a manner that attracts some attention.

LADY CHILTERN

Dear Mabel, don't talk like that. Besides, Robert thinks very highly of Mr. Trafford. He believes he has a brillant future before him.

MABEL CHILTERN

Oh! I wouldn't marry a man with a future before him for anything under the sun.

LADY CHILTERN

Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN

I know, dear. You married a man with a future, didn't you? But then Robert was a genius, and you have a noble, self-sacrificing

character. You can stand geniuses. I have no character at all, and Robert is the only genius I could ever bear. As a rule, I think they are quite impossible. Geniuses talk so much, don't they? Such a bad habit! And they are always thinking about themselves, when I want them to be thinking about me. I must go round now and rehearse at Lady Basildon's. You remember, we are having tableaux, don't you? The Triumph of something, I don't know what! I hope it will be triumph of me. Only triumph I am really interested in at present. [*Kisses Lady Chiltern and goes out; then comes running back.*] Oh, Gertrude, do you know who is coming to see you? That dreadful Mrs. Cheveley, in a most lovely gown. Did you ask her?

LADY CHILTERN

[*Rising.*] Mrs. Cheveley! Coming to see me? Impossible!

MABEL CHILTERN

I assure you she is coming upstairs, as large as life and not nearly so natural.

LADY CHILTERN

You need not wait, Mabel. Remember, Lady Basildon is expecting you.

MABEL CHILTERN

Oh! I must shake hands with Lady Markby. She is delightful. I love being scolded by her.

[*Enter Mason.*]

MASON

Lady Markby. Mrs. Cheveley.

[*Enter Lady Markby and Mrs. Cheveley.*]

LADY CHILTERN

[*Advancing to meet them.*] Dear Lady Markby, how nice of you to come and see me! [*Shakes hands with her, and bows somewhat distantly to Mrs. Cheveley.*] Won't you sit down, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Thanks. Isn't that Miss Chiltern? I should like so much to know her.

LADY CHILTERN

Mabel, Mrs. Cheveley wishes to know you. [*Mabel Chiltern gives a little nod.*]

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Sitting down.*] I thought your frock so charming last night, Miss Chiltern. So simple and . . . suitable.

MABEL CHILTERN

Really? I must tell my dressmaker. It will be such a surprise to her. Good-bye, Lady Markby!

LADY MARKBY

Going already?

MABEL CHILTERN

I am so sorry but I am obliged to. I am just off to rehearsal. I have got to stand on my head in some tableaux.

LADY MARKBY

On your head, child? Oh, I hope not. I believe it is most unhealthy. [*Takes a seat on the sofa next Lady Chiltern.*]

MABEL CHILTERN

But it is for an excellent charity; in aid of the Undeserving, the only people I am really interested in. I am the secretary, and Tommy Trafford is treasurer.

MRS. CHEVELEY

And what is Lord Goring?

MABEL CHILTERN

Oh! Lord Goring is president.

MRS. CHEVELEY

The post should suit him admirably, unless he has deteriorated since I knew him first.

LADY MARKBY

[*Reflecting.*] You are remarkably modern, Mabel. A little too modern, perhaps. Nothing is so dangerous as being too modern. One is apt to grow old-fashioned quite suddenly. I have known many instances of it.

MABEL CHILTERN

What a dreadful prospect!

LADY MARKBY

Ah, my dear, you need not be nervous. You will always be as pretty as possible. That is the best fashion there is, and the only fashion that England succeeds in setting.

MABEL CHILTERN

[*With a curtsey.*] Thank you so much, Lady Markby, for England . . . and myself. [*Goes out.*]

LADY MARKBY

[*Turning to Lady Chiltern.*] Dear Gertrude, we just called to know if Mrs. Cheveley's diamond brooch has been found.

LADY CHILTERN

Here?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Yes. I missed it when I got back to Claridge's, and I thought I might possibly have dropped it here.

LADY CHILTERN

I have heard nothing about it. But I will send for the butler and ask. [*Touches the bell.*]

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh, pray don't trouble, Lady Chiltern. I daresay I lost it at the Opera before we came on here.

LADY MARKBY

Ah yes, I suppose it must have been at the Opera. The fact is, we all scramble and jostle so much nowadays that I wonder we have anything at all left on us at the end of an evening. I know myself that, when I am coming back from the Drawing Room, I always feel as if I hadn't a shred on me, except a small shred of decent reputation, just enough to prevent the

lower classes making painful observations though the windows of the carriage. The fact is that our Society is terribly overpopulated. Really, some one should arrange a proper scheme of assisted emigration. It would do a great deal of good.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I quite agree with you, Lady Markby. It is nearly six years since I have been in London for the season, and I must say Society has become dreadfully mixed. One sees the oddest people everywhere.

LADY MARKBY

That is quite true, dear. But one needn't know them. I'm sure I don't know half the people who come to my house. Indeed, from all I hear, I shouldn't like to.

[*Enter Mason.*]

LADY CHILTERN

What sort of a brooch was it that you lost, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY

A diamond snake-brooch, with a ruby, a rather large ruby?

LADY MARKBY

I thought you said there was a sapphire on the head, dear?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Smiling.*] No, Lady Markby—a ruby.

LADY MARKBY

[*Nodding her head.*] And very becoming, I am quite sure.

LADY CHILTERN

Has a ruby and diamond brooch been found in any of the rooms this morning, Mason?

MASON

No, my lady.

MRS. CHEVELEY

It really is of no consequence, Lady Chiltern. I am so sorry to have put you to any inconvenience.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Coldly.*] Oh, it has been no inconvenience. That will do, Mason. You can bring tea.

[*Exit Mason.*]

LADY MARKBY

Well, I must say it is most annoying to lose anything. I remember once at Bath, years ago, losing in the Pump Room an exceedingly handsome cameo bracelet that Sir John had given me. I don't think he has ever given me anything since, I am sorry to say. He has sadly degenerated. Really, this horrid House of Commons quite ruins our husbands for us. I think the Lower House by far the greatest blow to a happy married life that there has been since that terrible thing called the Higher Education of Women was invented.

LADY CHILTERN

Ah, it is heresy to say that in this house, Lady Markby. Robert is a great champion of the Higher Education of Women, and so, I am afraid, am I.

MRS. CHEVELEY

The higher education of men is what I should like to see. Men need it so sadly.

LADY MARKBY

They do, dear. But I am afraid such a scheme would be quite unpractical. I don't

think man has much capacity for development. He has got as far as he can, and that is not far, is it? With regard to women, well, dear Gertrude, you belong to the younger generation, and I am sure it is all right if you approve of it. In my time, of course, we were taught not to understand anything. That was the old system, and wonderfully interesting it was. I assure you that the amount of things I and my poor dear sister were taught not to understand was quite extraordinary. But modern women understand everything, I am told.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Except their husbands. That is the one thing the modern woman never understands.

LADY MARKBY

And a very good thing, too, dear, I daresay. It might break up many a happy home if they did. Not yours, I need hardly say, Gertrude. You have married a pattern husband. I wish I could say as much for myself. But since Sir John has taken to attending the debates regularly, which he never used to do in the good old days, his language has become quite impossible. He always seems to think that he is addressing

the House and consequently whenever he discusses the state of the agricultural labourer, or the Welsh Church, or something quite improper of that kind, I am obliged to send all the servants out of the room. It is not pleasant to see one's own butler, who has been with one for twenty-three years, actually blushing at the sideboard, and the footmen making contortions in corners like persons in circuses. I assure you my life will be quite ruined unless they send John at once to the Upper House. He won't take any interest in politics then, will he? The House of Lords is so sensible. An assembly of gentlemen. But in his present state, Sir John is really a great trial. Why, this morning before breakfast was half over, he stood up on the hearthrug, put his hands in his pockets, and appealed to the country at the top of his voice. I left the table as soon as I had my second cup of tea, I need hardly say. But his violent language could be heard all over the house! I trust, Gertrude, that Sir Robert is not like that?

LADY CHILTERN

But I am very much interested in politics, Lady Markby. I love to hear Robert talk about them.

LADY MARKBY

Well, I hope he is not as devoted to Blue Books as Sir John is. I don't think they can be quite improving reading for anyone.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Languidly.*] I have never read a Blue Book. I prefer books . . . in yellow covers.

LADY MARKBY

[*Genially unconscious.*] Yellow is a gayer colour, is it not? I used to wear yellow a good deal in my early days, and would do so now if Sir John was not so painfully personal in his observations, and a man on the question of dress is always ridiculous, is he not?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh, no! I think men are the only authorities on dress.

LADY MARKBY

Really? One wouldn't say so from the sort of hats they wear, would one?

[*The butler enters, followed by the footman. Tea is set on a small table close to Lady Chiltern.*]

LADY CHILTERN

May I give you some tea, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Thanks. [*The butler hands Mrs. Cheveley a cup of tea on a salver.*]

LADY CHILTERN

Some tea, Lady Markby?

LADY MARKBY

No thanks dear. [*The servants go out.*] The fact is, I have promised to go round for ten minutes to see poor Lady Brancaster, who is in very great trouble. Her daughter, quite a well-brought-up girl, too, has actually become engaged to be married to a curate in Shropshire. It is very sad, very sad indeed. I can't understand this modern mania for curates. In my time we girls saw them, of course, running about the place like rabbits. But we never took any notice of them, I need hardly say. But I am told that nowadays country society is quite honeycombed with them. I think it most irreligious. And then the eldest son has quarrelled with his father, and it is said that when they meet at the club Lord Brancaster always hides

himself behind the money article in "The Times." However, I believe that is quite a common occurrence nowadays and that they have to take in extra copies of "The Times" at all the clubs in St. James's Street; there are so many sons who won't have anything to do with their fathers, and so many fathers who won't speak to their sons. I think myself, it is very much to be regretted.

MRS. CHEVELEY

So do I. Fathers have so much to learn from their sons nowadays.

LADY MARKBY

Really, dear? What?

MRS. CHEVELEY

The art of living. The only really Fine Art we have produced in modern times.

LADY MARKBY

[*Shaking her head.*] Ah! I am afraid Lord Brancaster knew a good deal about that. More than his poor wife ever did. [*Turning to Lady Chiltern.*] You know Lady Brancaster, don't you, dear?

LADY CHILTERN

Just slightly. She was staying at Langston last autumn, when we were there.

LADY MARKBY

Well, like all stout women, she looks the very picture of happiness, as no doubt you noticed. But there are many tragedies in her family, besides this affair of the curate. Her own sister, Mrs. Jekyll, had a most unhappy life; through no fault of her own, I am sorry to say. She ultimately was so broken-hearted that she went into a convent, or on to the operatic stage, I forget which. No; I think it was decorative art-needlework she took up. I know she had lost all sense of pleasure in life. [*Rising.*] And now, Gertrude, if you will allow me, I shall leave Mrs. Cheveley in your charge and call back for her in a quarter of an hour. Or perhaps, dear Mrs. Cheveley, you wouldn't mind waiting in the carriage while I am with Lady Brancaster. As I intend it to be a visit of condolence, I shan't stay long.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Rising.*] I don't mind waiting in the car-

riage at all, provided there is somebody to look at one.

LADY MARKBY

Well, I hear the curate is always prowling about the house.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I am afraid I am not fond of girl friends.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Rising.*] Oh, I hope Mrs. Cheveley will stay here a little. I should like to have a few minutes' conversation with her.

MRS. CHEVELEY

How very kind of you, Lady Chiltern! Believe me, nothing would give me greater pleasure.

LADY MARKBY

Ah! no doubt you both have many pleasant reminiscences of your schooldays to talk over together. Good-bye, dear Gertrude! Shall I see you at Lady Bonar's to-night? She has discovered a wonderful new genius. He does . . . nothing at all, I believe. That is a great comfort, is it not?

LADY CHILTERN

Robert and I are dining at home by ourselves to-night, and I don't think I shall go anywhere afterwards. Robert, of course, will have to be in the House. But there is nothing interesting on.

LADY MARKBY

Dining at home by yourselves? Is that quite prudent? Ah, I forgot, your husband is an exception. Mine is the general rule, and nothing ages a woman so rapidly as having married the general rule. [*Exit Lady Markby.*]

MRS. CHEVELEY

Wonderful woman, Lady Markby, isn't she? Talks more and says less than anybody I ever met. She is made to be a public speaker. Much more so than her husband, though he is a typical Englishman, always dull and usually violent.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Makes no answer, but remains standing. There is a pause. Then the eyes of the two women meet. Lady Chiltern looks stern and pale. Mrs. Cheveley seems rather amused.*] Mrs. Cheveley, I think it is right to tell you quite

frankly that, had I known who you really were, I should not have invited you to my house last night.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*With an impertinent smile.*] Really?

LADY CHILTERN

I could not have done so.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I see that after all these years you have not changed a bit, Gertrude.

LADY CHILTERN

I never change.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Elevating her eyebrows.*] Then life has taught you nothing?

LADY CHILTERN

It has taught me that a person who has once been guilty of a dishonest and dishonourable action may be guilty of it a second time, and should be shunned.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Would you apply that rule to everyone?

LADY CHILTERN

Yes, to everyone, without exception.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Then I am sorry for you, Gertrude, very sorry for you.

LADY CHILTERN

You see now, I am sure, that for many reasons any further acquaintance between us during your stay in London is quite impossible?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Leaning back in her chair.*] Do you know, Gertrude, I don't mind your talking morality a bit. Morality is simply the attitude we adopt towards people whom we personally dislike. You dislike me. I am quite aware of that. And I have always detested you. And yet I have come here to do you a service.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Contemptuously.*] Like the service you wished to render my husband last night, I suppose. Thank heaven, I saved him from that.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Starting to her feet.*] It was you who made

him write that insolent letter to me? It was you who made him break his promise?

LADY CHILTERN

Yes.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Then you must make him keep it. I give you till to-morrow morning—no more. If by that time your husband does not solemnly bind himself to help me in this great scheme in which I am interested——

LADY CHILTERN

This fraudulent speculation——

MRS. CHEVELEY

Call it what you choose. I hold your husband in the hollow of my hand, and if you are wise you will make him do what I tell him.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Rising and going towards her.*] You are impertinent. What has my husband to do with you? With a woman like you?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*With a bitter laugh.*] In this world like

meets with like. It is because your husband is himself fraudulent and dishonest that we pair so well together. Between you and him there are chasms. He and I are closer than friends. We are enemies linked together. The same sin binds us.

LADY CHILTERN

How dare you class my husband with yourself? How dare you threaten him or me? Leave my house. You are unfit to enter it.

[*Sir Robert Chiltern enters from behind. He hears his wife's last words, and sees to whom they are addressed. He grows deadly pale.*]

MRS. CHEVELEY

Your house! A house bought with the price of dishonour. A house, everything in which has been paid for by fraud. [*Turns round and sees Sir Robert Chiltern.*] Ask him what the origin of his fortune is! Get him to tell you how he sold to a stockbroker a Cabinet secret. Learn from him to what you owe your position.

LADY CHILTERN

It is not true! Robert! It is not true!

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Pointing at him with outstretched finger.*] Look at him! Can he deny it? Does he dare to?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Go! Go at once. You have done your worst now.

MRS. CHEVELEY

My worst? I have not yet finished with you, with either of you. I give you both till to-morrow at noon. If by then you don't do what I bid you to do, the whole world shall know the origin of Robert Chiltern.

[*Sir Robert Chiltern strikes the bell. Enter Mason.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Show Mrs. Cheveley out.

[*Mrs. Cheveley starts; then bows with somewhat exaggerated politeness to Lady Chiltern, who makes no sign of response. As she passes by Sir Robert Chiltern, who is standing close to the door, she pauses for a moment and looks him straight in the face. She then goes out, followed by the servant, who closes the door after*

him. The husband and wife are left alone. Lady Chiltern stands like some one in a dreadful dream. Then she turns round and looks at her husband. She looks at him with strange eyes, as though she were seeing him for the first time.]

LADY CHILTERN

You sold a Cabinet secret for money! You began your life with fraud! You built up your career on dishonour! Oh, tell me it is not true! Lie to me! Lie to me! Tell me it is not true!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

What this woman said is quite true. But, Gertrude, listen to me. You don't realize how I was tempted. Let me tell you the whole thing. [*Goes towards her.*]

LADY CHILTERN

Don't come near me. Don't touch me. I feel as if you had soiled me forever. Oh! what a mask you have been wearing all these years! A horrible painted mask! You sold yourself for money. Oh! a common thief were better! You put yourself up to sale to the highest bidder! You were bought in the market. You

lied to the whole world. And yet you will not lie to me.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Rushing towards her.*] Gertrude! Gertrude!

LADY CHILTERN

[*Thrusting him back with outstretched hands.*] No, don't speak! Say nothing! Your voice wakes terrible memories—memories of things that made me love you—memories of words that made me love you—memories that now are horrible to me. And how I worshipped you! You were to me something apart from common life, a thing pure, noble, honest, without stain. The world seemed to me finer because you were in it, and goodness more real because you lived. And now—oh, when I think that I made of a man like you my ideal! the ideal of my life!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

There was your mistake. There was your error. The error all women commit. Why can't you women love us, faults and all? Why do you place us on monstrous pedestals? We have all feet of clay, women as well as men:

but when we men love women, we love them knowing their weaknesses, their follies, their imperfections, love them all the more, it may be, for that reason. It is not the perfect, but the imperfect, who have need of love. It is when we are wounded by our own hands, or by the hands of others, that love should come to cure us—else what use is love at all? All sins, except a sin against itself, Love should forgive. All lives, save loveless lives, true Love should pardon. A man's love is like that. It is wider, larger, more human than a woman's. Women think that they are making ideals of men. What they are making of us are false idols merely. You made your false idol of me, and I had not the courage to come down, show you my wounds, tell you my weaknesses. I was afraid that I might lose your love, as I have lost it now. And so, last night you ruined my life for me—yes, ruined it! What this woman asked of me was nothing compared to what she offered to me. She offered security, peace, stability. The sin of my youth, that I had thought was buried, rose up in front of me, hideous, horrible, with its hands at my throat. I could have killed it for ever, sent it back into its tomb,

destroyed its record, burned the one witness against me. You prevented me. No one but you, you know it. And now what is there before me but public disgrace, ruin, terrible shame, the mockery of the world, a lonely dishonoured life, a lonely dishonoured death, it may be, some day? Let women make no more ideals of men! let them not put them on altars and bow before them, or they may ruin other lives as completely as you—you whom I have so wildly loved—have ruined mine!

[*He passes from the room. Lady Chiltern rushes towards him, but the door is closed when she reaches it. Pale with anguish, bewildered, helpless, she sways like a plant in the water. Her hands, outstretched, seem to tremble in the air like blossoms in the wind. Then she flings herself down beside a sofa and buries her face. Her sobs are like the sobs of a child.*]

ACT-DROP.

THIRD ACT.

SCENE—*The Library in Lord Goring's house. An Adam room. On the right is the door leading into the hall. On the left, the door of the smoking-room. A pair of folding doors at the back open into the drawing-room. The fire is lit. Phipps, the butler, is arranging some newspapers on the writing-table. The distinction of Phipps is his impassivity. He has been termed by enthusiasts the Ideal Butler. The Sphinx is not so incommunicable. He is a mask with a manner. Of his intellectual or emotional life history knows nothing. He represents the dominance of form.*

[*Enter Lord Goring in evening dress with a buttonhole. He is wearing a silk hat and Inverness cape. White-gloved, he carries a Louis Seize cane. His are all the delicate fopperies of*

Fashion. One sees that he stands in immediate relation to modern life, makes it indeed, and so masters it. He is the first well-dressed philosopher in the history of thought.]

LORD GORING

Got my second buttonhole for me, Phipps?

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord. [*Takes his hat, cane and cape, and presents new buttonhole on salver.*]

LORD GORING

Rather distinguished thing, Phipps. I am the only person of the smallest importance in London at present who wears a buttonhole.

PHIPPS

Yes, my Lord, I have observed that.

LORD GORING

[*Taking out old buttonhole.*] You see, Phipps, Fashion is what one wears oneself. What is unfashionable is what other people wear.

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING

Just as vulgarity is simply the conduct of other people.

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING

[*Putting in new buttonhole.*] And falsehoods the truths of other people.

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING

Other people are quite dreadful. The only possible society is oneself.

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING

To love oneself is the beginning of a life-long romance, Phipps.

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING

[*Looking at himself in the glass.*] Don't think I quite like this buttonhole, Phipps. Makes me look a little too old. Makes me almost in the prime of life, eh, Phipps?

PHIPPS

I don't observe any alteration in your lordship's appearance.

LORD GORING

You don't, Phipps?

PHIPPS

No, my lord.

LORD GORING

I am not quite sure. For the future a more trivial buttonhole, Phipps, on Thursday evenings.

PHIPPS

I will speak to the florist, my lord. She has had a loss in her family lately, which perhaps accounts for the lack of triviality your lordship complains of in the buttonhole.

LORD GORING

Extraordinary thing about the lower classes in England—they are always losing their relations.

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord! They are extremely fortunate in that respect.

LORD GORING

[*Turns round and looks at him. Phipps remains impassive.*] Hum! Any letters, Phipps?

PHIPPS

Three, my lord. [*Hands letters on a salver.*]

LORD GORING

[*Takes letters.*] Want my cab round in twenty minutes.

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord. [*Goes towards door.*]

LORD GORING

[*Holds up letter in pink envelope.*] Ahem! Phipps, when did this letter arrive?

PHIPPS

It was brought by hand just after your lordship went to the Club.

LORD GORING

That will do. [*Exit Phipps.*] Lady Chiltern's handwriting on Lady Chiltern's pink notepaper. That is rather curious. I thought Robert was to write. Wonder what Lady Chiltern has got to say to me? [*Sits at bureau and opens letter, and reads it.*] "I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you. Gertrude." [*Puts down the letter with a puzzled look. Then takes it up, and reads it again slowly.*] "I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you." So she has found out everything! Poor woman! Poor woman! [*Pulls out watch and looks at it.*] But what an hour to call! Ten o'clock! I shall have to give up going to the Berkshires. However, it is always nice to be expected, and not to arrive. I am not expected at the Bachelors', so I shall certainly go there. Well, I will make her stand by her husband. That is the only thing for her to do. That is the only thing for any woman to do. It is the growth of the moral sense in women that makes marriage such a hopeless, one-sided institution. Ten o'clock. She should be here soon. I must tell Phipps I am not in to anyone else. [*Goes towards bell.*]

[*Enter Phipps.*]

PHIPPS

Lord Caversham.

LORD GORING

Oh, why will parents always appear at the wrong time? Some extraordinary mistake in nature, I suppose. [*Enter Lord Caversham.*] Delighted to see you, my dear father. [*Goes to meet him.*]

LORD CAVERSHAM

Take my cloak off.

LORD GORING

Is it worth while, father?

LORD CAVERSHAM

Of course it is worth while, sir. Which is the most comfortable chair?

LORD GORING

This one, father. It is the chair I use myself, when I have visitors.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Thank ye. No draught, I hope, in this room?

LORD GORING

No, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Sitting down.*] Glad to hear it. Can't stand draughts. No draughts at home.

LORD GORING

Good many breezes, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Eh? Eh? Don't understand what you mean. Want to have a serious conversation with you, sir.

LORD GORING

My dear father! At this hour?

LORD CAVERSHAM

Well, sir, it is only ten o'clock. What is your objection to the hour? I think the hour is an admirable hour!

LORD GORING

Well, the fact is, father, this is not my day for talking seriously. I am very sorry, but it is not my day.

LORD CAVERSHAM

What do you mean, sir?

LORD GORING

During the season, father, I only talk seriously on the first Tuesday in every month, from four to seven.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Well, make it Tuesday, sir, make it Tuesday.

LORD GORING

But it is after seven, father, and my doctor says I must not have any serious conversation after seven. It makes me talk in my sleep.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Talk in your sleep, sir? What does that matter? You are not married.

LORD GORING

No, father, I am not married.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Hum! That is what I have come to talk to you about, sir. You have got to get married, and at once. Why, when I was your age, sir, I had been an inconsolable widower for three

months, and was already paying my addresses to your admirable mother. Damme, sir, it is your duty to get married. You can't be always living for pleasure. Every man of position is married nowadays. Bachelors are not fashionable any more. They are a damaged lot. Too much is known about them. You must get a wife, sir. Look where your friend Robert Chiltern has got to by probity, hard work, and a sensible marriage with a good woman. Why don't you imitate him, sir? Why don't you take him for your model?

LORD GORING

I think I shall, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM

I wish you would, sir. Then I should be happy. At present I make your mother's life miserable on your account. You are heartless, sir, quite heartless.

LORD GORING

I hope not, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM

And it is high time for you to get married. You are thirty-four years of age, sir.

LORD GORING

Yes, father, but I only admit to thirty-two—thirty-one and a half when I have a really good buttonhole. This buttonhole is not . . . trivial enough.

LORD CAVERSHAM

I tell you you are thirty-four, sir. And there is a draught in your room, besides, which makes your conduct worse. Why did you tell me there was no draught, sir? I feel a draught, sir, I feel it distinctly.

LORD GORING

So do I, father. It is a dreadful draught. I will come and see you to-morrow, father. We can talk over anything you like. Let me help you on with your cloak, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM

No, sir; I have called this evening for a definite purpose, and I am going to see it through at all costs to my health or yours. Put down my cloak, sir.

LORD GORING

Certainly, father. But let us go into an-

other room. [*Rings bell.*] There is a dreadful draught here. [*Enter Phipps.*] Phipps, is there a good fire in the smoking-room?

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING

Come in there, father. Your sneezes are quite heart-rending.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Well, sir, I suppose I have a right to sneeze when I choose?

LORD GORING

[*Apologetically.*] Quite so, father. I was merely expressing sympathy.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Oh, damn sympathy. There is a great deal too much of that sort of thing going on nowadays.

LORD GORING

I quite agree with you, father. If there was less sympathy in the world there would be less trouble in the world.

LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Going towards the smoking-room.*] That is a paradox, sir. I hate paradoxes.

LORD GORING

So do I, father. Everybody one meets is a paradox nowadays. It is a great bore. It makes society so obvious.

LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Turning round and looking at his son beneath his bushy eyebrows.*] Do you always really understand what you say, sir?

LORD GORING

[*After some hesitation.*] Yes, father, if I listen attentively.

LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Indignantly.*] If you listen attentively! . . . Conceited young puppy!

[*Goes off grumbling into the smoking-room. Phipps enters.*]

LORD GORING

Phipps, there is a lady coming to see me this evening on particular business. Show her into

the drawing-room when she arrives. You understand?

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING

It is a matter of the gravest importance, Phipps.

PHIPPS

I understand, my lord.

LORD GORING

No one else is to be admitted, under any circumstances.

PHIPPS

I understand, my lord. [*Bell rings.*]

LORD GORING

Ah, that is probably the lady. I shall see her myself.

[*Just as he is going towards the door Lord Caversham enters from the smoking-room.*]

LORD CAVERSHAM

Well, sir? am I to wait attendance on you?

LORD GORING

[*Considerably perplexed.*] In a moment, father. Do excuse me. [*Lord Caversham goes back.*] Well, remember my instructions, Phipps —into that room.

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

[*Lord Goring goes into the smoking-room. Harold, the footman, shows Mrs. Cheveley in. Lamia-like, she is in green and silver. She has a cloak of black satin, lined with dead rose-leaf silk.*]

HAROLD

What name, madam?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*To Phipps, who advances towards her.*] Is Lord Goring not here? I was told he was at home.

PHIPPS

His lordship is engaged at present with Lord Caversham, madam.

[*Turns a cold, glassy eye on Harold, who at once retires.*]

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*To herself.*] How very filial!

PHIPPS

His lordship told me to ask you, madam, to be kind enough to wait in the drawing-room for him. His lordship will come to you there.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*With a look of surprise.*] Lord Goring expects me?

PHIPPS

Yes, madam.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Are you quite sure?

PHIPPS

His lordship told me that if a lady called I was to ask her to wait in the drawing-room. [*Goes to the door of the drawing-room and opens it.*] His lordship's directions on the subject were very precise.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*To herself.*] How thoughtful of him! To expect the unexpected shows a thoroughly mod-

ern intellect. [*Goes towards the drawing-room and looks in.*] Ugh! How dreary a bachelor's drawing-room always looks. I shall have to alter all this. [*Phipps brings the lamp from the writing-table.*] No, I don't care for that lamp. It is far too glaring. Light some candles.

PHIPPS

[*Replaces lamp.*] Certainly, madam.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I hope the candles have very becoming shades.

PHIPPS

We have had no complaints about them, madam, as yet.

[*Passes into the drawing-room and begins to light the candles.*]

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*To herself.*] I wonder what woman he is waiting for to-night. It will be delightful to catch him. Men always look so silly when they are caught. And they are always being caught. [*Looks about room and approaches the writing-table.*] What a very interesting room! What a very interesting picture! Wonder what his

correspondence is like. [*Takes up letters.*] Oh, what a very uninteresting correspondence! Bills and cards, debts and dowagers! Who on earth writes to him on pink paper! How silly to write on pink paper! It looks like the beginning of a middle-class romance. Romance should never begin with sentiment. It should begin with science and end with a settlement. [*Puts letter down, then takes it up again.*] I know that handwriting. That is Gertrude Chiltern's. I remember it perfectly. The ten commandments in every stroke of the pen, and the moral law all over the page. Wonder what Gertrude is writing to him about? Something horrid about me, I suppose. How I detest that woman! [*Reads it.*] "I trust you. I want you. I am coming to you. Gertrude." "I trust you. I want you. I am coming to you."

[*A look of triumph comes over her face. She is just about to steal the letter, when Phipps comes in.*]

PHIPPS

The candles in the drawing-room are lit, madam, as you directed.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Thank you. [*Rises hastily, and slips the letter under a large silver-cased blotting-book that is lying on the table.*]

PHIPPS

I trust the shades will be to your liking, madam. They are the most becoming we have. They are the same as his lordship uses himself when he is dressing for dinner.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*With a smile.*] Then I am sure they will be perfectly right.

PHIPPS

[*Gravely.*] Thank you, madam.

[*Mrs. Cheveley goes into the drawing-room. Phipps closes the door and retires. The door is then slowly opened, and Mrs. Cheveley comes out and creeps stealthily towards the writing-table. Suddenly voices are heard from the smoking-room. Mrs. Cheveley grows pale and stops. The voices grow louder, and she goes back into the drawing-room, biting her lip.*]

[*Enter Lord Goring and Lord Caversham.*]

LORD GORING

[*Expostulating.*] My dear father, if I am to get married, surely you will allow me to choose the time, place and person? Particularly the person.

LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Testily.*] That is a matter for me, sir. You would probably make a very poor choice. It is I who should be consulted, not you. There is property at stake. It is not a matter for affection. Affection comes later on in married life.

LORD GORING

Yes. In married life affection comes when people thoroughly dislike each other, father, doesn't it? [*Puts on Lord Caversham's cloak for him.*]

LORD CAVERSHAM

Certainly, sir. I mean certainly not, sir. You are talking very foolishly to-night. What I say is that marriage is a matter for common sense.

LORD GORING

But women who have common sense are so

curiously plain, father, aren't they? Of course I only speak from hearsay.

LORD CAVERSHAM

No woman, plain or pretty, has any common sense at all, sir. Common sense is the privilege of our own sex.

LORD GORING

Quite so. And we men are so self-sacrificing that we never use it, do we, father?

LORD CAVERSHAM

I use it, sir. I use nothing else.

LORD GORING

So my mother tells me.

LORD CAVERSHAM

It is the secret of your mother's happiness. You are very heartless, sir, very heartless.

LORD GORING

I hope not, father.

[*Goes out for a moment. Then returns, looking rather put out, with Sir Robert Chiltern.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

My dear Arthur, what a piece of good luck

meeting you on the doorstep! Your servant had just told me you were not at home. How extraordinary!

LORD GORING

The fact is, I am horribly busy to-night, Robert, and I gave orders I was not at home to anyone. Even my father had a comparatively cold reception. He complained of a draught the whole time.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Ah! you must be at home to me, Arthur. You are my best friend. Perhaps by to-morrow you will be my only friend. My wife has discovered everything.

LORD GORING

Ah! I guessed as much!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Looking at him.*] Really! How?

LORD GORING

[*After some hesitation.*] Oh, merely by something in the expression of your face as you came in. Who told her?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Mrs. Cheveley herself. And the woman I love knows that I began my career with an act of low dishonesty, that I built up my life upon sands of shame—that I sold, like a common huckster, the secret that had been intrusted to me as a man of honour. I thank heaven poor Lord Radley died without knowing that I betrayed him. I would to God I had died before I had been so horribly tempted, or had fallen so low. [*Burying his face in his hands.*]

LORD GORING

[*After a pause.*] You have heard nothing from Vienna yet, in answer to your wire?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Looking up.*] Yes; I got a telegram from the first secretary at eight o'clock to-night.

LORD GORING

Well?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Nothing is absolutely known against her. On the contrary, she occupies a rather high position in society. It is a sort of open secret that

Baron Arnheim left her the greater portion of his immense fortune. Beyond that I can learn nothing.

LORD GORING

She doesn't turn out to be a spy, then?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Oh! spies are of no use nowadays. Their profession is over. The newspapers do their work instead.

LORD GORING

And thunderingly well they do it.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Arthur, I am parched with thirst. May I ring for something? Some hock and seltzer?

LORD GORING

Certainly. Let me. [*Rings the bell.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Thanks! I don't know what to do, Arthur, I don't know what to do, and you are my only friend. But what a friend you are—the one friend I can trust. I can trust you absolutely, can't I?

[*Enter Phipps.*]

LORD GORING

My dear Robert, of course. Oh! [*To Phipps.*] Bring some hock and seltzer.

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING

And Phipps!

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING

Will you excuse me for a moment, Robert? I want to give some directions to my servant.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Certainly.

LORD GORING

When that lady calls, tell her that I am not expected home this evening. Tell her that I have been suddenly called out of town. You understand?

PHIPPS

The lady is in that room, my lord. You told me to show her into that room, my lord.

LORD GORING

You did perfectly right. [*Exit Phipps.*] What a mess I am in. No; I think I shall get through it. I'll give her a lecture through the door. Awkward thing to manage, though.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Arthur, tell me what I should do. My life seems to have crumbled about me. I am a ship without a rudder in a night without a star.

LORD GORING

Robert, you love your wife, don't you?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I love her more than anything in the world. I used to think ambition the great thing. It is not. Love is the great thing in the world. There is nothing but love, and I love her. But I am defamed in her eyes. I am ignoble in her eyes. There is a wide gulf between us now. She has found me out, Arthur, she has found me out.

LORD GORING

Has she never in her life done some folly—some indiscretion—that she should not forgive your sin?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

My wife! Never! She does not know what weakness or temptation is. I am of clay like other men. She stands apart as good women do—pitiless in her perfection—cold and stern and without mercy. But I love her, Arthur. We are childless, and I have no one else to love, no one else to love me. Perhaps if God had sent us children she might have been kinder to me. But God has given us a lonely house. And she has cut my heart in two. Don't let us talk of it. I was brutal to her this evening. But I suppose when sinners talk to saints they are brutal always. I said to her things that were hideously true, on my side, from my standpoint, from the standpoint of men. But don't let us talk of that.

LORD GORING

Your wife will forgive you. Perhaps at this moment she is forgiving you. She loves you, Robert. Why should she not forgive?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

God grant it! God grant it! [*Buries his face in his hands.*] But there is something more I have to tell you, Arthur.

[*Enter Phipps with drinks.*]

PHIPPS

[*Hands hock and seltzer to Sir Robert Chiltern.*] Hock and seltzer, sir.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Thank you.

LORD GORING

Is your carriage here, Robert?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

No; I walked from the club.

LORD GORING

Sir Robert will take my cab, Phipps.

PHIPPS

Yes, my lord.

LORD GORING

Robert, you don't mind my sending you away?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Arthur, you must let me stay for five minutes. I have made up my mind what I am going to do to-night in the House. The debate on the Ar-

gentine Canal is to begin at eleven. [*A chair falls in the drawing-room.*] What is that?

LORD GORING

Nothing.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I heard a chair fall in the next room. Some one has been listening.

LORD GORING

No, no; there is no one there.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

There is some one. There are lights in the room, and the door is ajar. Some one has been listening to every secret of my life. Arthur, what does this mean?

LORD GORING

Robert, you are excited, unnerved. I tell you there is no one in that room. Sit down, Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Do you give me your word that there is no one there?

LORD GORING

Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Your word of honour? [*Sits down.*]

LORD GORING

Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Rises.*] Arthur, let me see for myself.

LORD GORING

No, no.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

If there is no one there why should I not look in that room? Arthur, you must let me go into that room and satisfy myself. Let me know that no eavesdropper has heard my life's secret. Arthur, you don't realize what I am going through.

LORD GORING

Robert, this must stop. I have told you that there is no one in that room—that is enough.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Rushes to the door of the room.*] It is not enough. I insist on going into this room. You

have told me there is no one there, so what reason can you have for refusing me?

LORD GORING

For God's sake, don't! There is some one there. Some one whom you must not see.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Ah, I thought so!

LORD GORING

I forbid you to enter that room.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Stand back. My life is at stake. And I don't care who is there. I will know who it is to whom I have told my secret and my shame. [*Enters room.*]

LORD GORING

Great Heavens! his own wife!

[*Sir Robert Chiltern comes back, with a look of scorn and anger on his face.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

What explanation have you to give me for the presence of that woman here?

LORD GORING

Robert, I swear to you on my honour that that lady is stainless and guiltless of all offence towards you.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

She is a vile, an infamous thing!

LORD GORING

Don't say that, Robert! It was for your sake she came here. It was to try and save you she came here. She loves you and no one else.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

You are mad. What have I to do with her intrigues with you? Let her remain your mistress! You are well suited to each other. She, corrupt and shameful—you, false as a friend, treacherous as an enemy even——

LORD GORING

It is not true, Robert. Before heaven, it is not true. In her presence and in yours I will explain all.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Let me pass, sir. You have lied enough upon your word of honour.

[*Sir Robert Chiltern goes out. Lord Goring rushes to the door of the drawing-room, when Mrs. Cheveley comes out, looking radiant and much amused.*]

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*With a mock curtsey.*] Good evening, Lord Goring!

LORD GORING

Mrs. Cheveley! Great Heavens! . . . May I ask what you were doing in my drawing-room?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Merely listening. I have a perfect passion for listening through keyholes. One always hears such wonderful things through them.

LORD GORING

Doesn't that sound rather like tempting Providence?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh, surely Providence can resist temptation by this time. [*Makes a sign to him to take her cloak off, which he does.*]

LORD GORING

I am glad you have called. I am going to give you some good advice.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Oh! pray don't. One should never give a woman anything that she can't wear in the evening.

LORD GORING

I see you are quite as wilful as you used to be.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Far more! I have greatly improved. I have had more experience.

LORD GORING

Too much experience is a dangerous thing. Pray have a cigarette. Half the pretty women in London smoke cigarettes. Personally I prefer the other half.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Thanks. I never smoke. My dressmaker wouldn't like it, and a woman's first duty in life is to her dressmaker, isn't it? What the second duty is, no one has as yet discovered.

LORD GORING

You have come here to sell me Robert Chiltern's letter, haven't you?

MRS. CHEVELEY

To offer it to you on conditions. How did you guess that?

LORD GORING

Because you haven't mentioned the subject. Have you got it with you?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Sitting down.*] Oh, no! A well-made dress has no pockets.

LORD GORING

What is your price for it?

MRS. CHEVELEY

How absurdly English you are! The English think that a cheque-book can solve every problem in life. Why, my dear Arthur, I have very much more money than you have, and quite as much as Robert Chiltern has got hold of. Money is not what I want.

LORD GORING

What do you want then, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Why don't you call me Laura?

LORD GORING

I don't like the name.

MRS. CHEVELEY

You used to adore it.

LORD GORING

Yes: that's why. [*Mrs. Cheveley motions to him to sit down beside her. He smiles, and does so.*]

MRS. CHEVELEY

Arthur, you loved me once.

LORD GORING

Yes.

MRS. CHEVELEY

And you asked me to be your wife.

LORD GORING

That was the natural result of my loving you.

MRS. CHEVELEY

And you threw me over because you saw, or said you saw, poor old Lord Mortlake trying to have a violent flirtation with me in the conservatory at Tenby.

LORD GORING

I am under the impression that my lawyer settled that matter with you on certains terms . . . dictated by yourself.

MRS. CHEVELEY

At that time I was poor; you were rich.

LORD GORING

Quite so. That is why you pretended to love me.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Shrugging her shoulders.*] Poor old Lord Mortlake, who had only two topics of conversation, his gout and his wife! I never could quite make out which of the two he was talking about. He used the most horrible language about them both. Well, you were silly, Arthur. Why, Lord Mortlake was never anything more to me than an amusement. One of those utterly tedi-

ous amusements one only finds at an English country house on an English country Sunday. I don't think anyone at all morally responsible for what he or she does at an English country house.

LORD GORING

Yes. I know lots of people think that.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I loved you, Arthur.

LORD GORING

My dear Mrs. Cheveley, you have always been far too clever to know anything about love.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I did love you. And you loved me. You know you loved me, and love is a very wonderful thing. I suppose that when a man has once loved a woman, he will do anything for her, except continue to love her? [*Puts her hand on his.*]

LORD GORING

[*Taking his hand away quietly.*] Yes; except that.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*After a pause.*] I am tired of living abroad. I want to come back to London. I want to have a charming house here. I want to have a salon. If one could only teach the English how to talk, and the Irish how to listen, society here would be quite civilized. Besides, I have arrived at the romantic stage. When I saw you last night at the Chilterns', I knew you were the only person I had ever cared for, if I ever have cared for anybody, Arthur. And so, on the morning of the day you marry me, I will give you Robert Chiltern's letter. That is my offer. I will give it to you now, if you promise to marry me.

LORD GORING

Now?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Smiling.*] To-morrow.

LORD GORING

Are you really serious?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Yes, quite serious.

LORD GORING

I should make you a very bad husband.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I don't mind bad husbands. I have had two. They amused me immensely.

LORD GORING

You mean that you amused yourself immensely, don't you?

MRS CHEVELEY

What do you know about my married life?

LORD GORING

Nothing: but I can read it like a book.

MRS. CHEVELEY

What book?

LORD GORING

[*Rising.*] The Book of Numbers.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Do you think it quite charming of you to be so rude to a woman in your own house?

LORD GORING

In the case of very fascinating women, sex is a challenge, not a defense.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I suppose that is meant for a compliment. My dear Arthur, women are never disarmed by compliments. Men always are. That is the difference between the two sexes.

LORD GORING

Women are never disarmed by anything, as far as I know them.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*After a pause.*] Then you are going to allow your greatest friend, Robert Chiltern, to be ruined, rather than marry some one who really has considerable attractions left. I thought you would have risen to some great height of self-sacrifice, Arthur, I think you should. And the rest of your life you could spend in contemplating your own perfections.

LORD GORING

Oh! I do that as it is. And self-sacrifice is a thing that should be put down by law. It

is so demoralizing to the people for whom one sacrifices oneself. They always go to the bad.

MRS. CHEVELEY

As if anything could demoralize Robert Chiltern! You seem to forget that I know his real character.

LORD GORING

What you know about him is not his real character. It was an act of folly done in his youth, dishonourable, I admit, shameful, I admit, unworthy of him, I admit, and therefore . . . not his true character.

MRS. CHEVELEY

How you men stand up for each other!

LORD GORING

How you women war against each other!

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Bitterly.*] I only war against one woman, against Gertrude Chiltern. I hate her. I hate her now more than ever.

LORD GORING

Because you have brought a real tragedy into her life, I suppose.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*With a sneer.*] Oh, there is only one real tragedy in a woman's life. The fact that her past is always her lover, and her future invariably her husband.

LORD GORING

Lady Chiltern knows nothing of the kind of life to which you are alluding.

MRS. CHEVELEY

A woman whose size in gloves is seven and three-quarters never knows much about anything. You know Gertrude has always worn seven and three-quarters? That is one of the reasons why there was never any moral sympathy between us . . . Well, Arthur, I suppose this romantic interview may be regarded as at an end. You admit it was romantic, don't you? For the privilege of being your wife I was ready to surrender a great prize, the climax of my diplomatic career. You declined. Very well. If Sir Robert doesn't uphold my Argentine scheme, I expose him. *Voilà tout.*

LORD GORING

You mustn't do that. It would be vile, horrible, infamous.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Shrugging her shoulders.*] Oh! don't use big words. They mean so little. It is a commercial transaction. That is all. There is no good mixing up sentimentality in it. I offered to sell Robert Chiltern a certain thing. If he won't pay me my price, he will have to pay the world a greater price. There is no more to be said. I must go. Good-bye. Won't you shake hands?

LORD GORING

With you? No. Your transaction with Robert Chiltern may pass as a loathsome commercial transaction of a loathsome commercial age; but you seem to have forgotten that you who came here to-night to talk of love, you whose lips desecrated the word love, you to whom the thing is a book closely sealed, went this afternoon to the house of one of the most noble and gentle women in the world to degrade her husband in her eyes, to try and kill her love for him, to put poison in her heart, and bitter-

ness in her life, to break her idol and, it may be, spoil her soul. That I cannot forgive you. That was horrible. For that there can be no forgiveness.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Arthur, you are unjust to me. Believe me, you are quite unjust to me. I didn't go to taunt Gertrude at all. I had no idea of doing anything of the kind when I entered. I called with Lady Markby simply to ask whether an ornament, a jewel, that I lost somewhere last night, had been found at the Chilterns'. If you don't believe me, you can ask Lady Markby. She will tell you it is true. The scene that occurred happened after Lady Markby had left, and was really forced on me by Gertrude's rudeness and sneers. I called, oh!—a little out of malice if you like—but really to ask if a diamond brooch of mine had been found. That was the origin of the whole thing.

LORD GORING

A diamond snake-brooch with a ruby?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Yes. How do you know?

LORD GORING

Because it is found. In point of fact, I found it myself, and stupidly forgot to tell the butler anything about it as I was leaving. [*Goes over to the writing-table and pulls out the drawers.*] It is in this drawer. No, that one. This is the brooch, isn't it? [*Holds up the brooch.*]

MRS. CHEVELEY

Yes. I am so glad to get it back. It was . . . a present.

LORD GORING

Won't you wear it?

MRS. CHEVELEY

Certainly, if you pin it in. [*Lord Goring suddenly clasps it on her arm.*] Why do you put it on as a bracelet? I never knew it could be worn as a bracelet.

LORD GORING

Really?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Holding out her handsome arm.*] No; but it looks very well on me as a bracelet, doesn't it?

LORD GORING

Yes; much better than when I saw it last.

MRS. CHEVELEY

When did you see it last?

LORD GORING

[*Calmly.*] Oh, ten years ago, on Lady Berkshire, from whom you stole it.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Starting.*] What do you mean?

LORD GORING

I mean that you stole that ornament from my cousin, Mary Berkshire, to whom I gave it when she was married. Suspicion fell on a wretched servant, who was sent away in disgrace. I recognized it last night. I determined to say nothing about it till I had found the thief. I have found the thief now, and I have heard her own confession.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Tossing her head.*] It is not true.

LORD GORING

You know it is true. Why, thief is written across your face at this moment.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I will deny the whole affair from beginning to end. I will say that I have never seen this wretched thing, that it was never in my possession.

[*Mrs. Cheveley tries to get the bracelet off her arm, but fails. Lord Goring looks on amused. Her thin fingers tear at the jewel to no purpose. A curse breaks from her.*]

LORD GORING

The drawback of stealing a thing, Mrs. Cheveley, is that one never knows how wonderful the thing that one steals is. You can't get that bracelet off, unless you know where the spring is. And I see you don't know where the spring is. It is rather difficult to find.

MRS. CHEVELEY

You brute! You coward! [*She tries again to unclasp the bracelet, but fails.*]

LORD GORING

Oh! don't use big words. They mean so little.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Again tears at the bracelet in a paroxysm of*

rage, with inarticulate sounds. Then stops, and looks at Lord Goring.] What are you going to do?

LORD GORING

I am going to ring for my servant. He is an admirable servant. Always comes in the moment one rings for him. When he comes I will tell him to fetch the police.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Trembling.*] The police? What for?

LORD GORING

To-morrow the Berkshires will prosecute you. That is what the police are for.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Is now in an agony of physical terror. . . . Her face is distorted. Her mouth awry. A mask has fallen from her. She is, for the moment, dreadful to look at.*] Don't do that. I will do anything you want. Anything in the world you want.

LORD GORING

Give me Robert Chiltern's letter.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Stop! Stop! Let me have time to think.

LORD GORING

Give me Robert Chiltern's letter.

MRS. CHEVELEY

I have not got it with me. I will give it to you to-morrow.

LORD GORING

You know you are lying. Give it to me at once. [*Mrs. Cheveley pulls the letter out, and hands it to him. She is horribly pale.*] This is it?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*In a hoarse voice.*] Yes.

LORD GORING

[*Takes the letter, examines it, sighs, and burns it over the lamp.*] For so well-dressed a woman, Mrs. Cheveley, you have moments of admirable common sense. I congratulate you.

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Catches sight of Lady Chiltern's letter, the cover of which is just showing from under the blotting-book.*] Please get me a glass of water.

LORD GORING

Certainly. [*Goes to the corner of the room and pours out a glass of water. While his back is turned Mrs. Cheveley steals Lady Chiltern's letter. When Lord Goring returns with the glass she refuses it with a gesture.*]

MRS. CHEVELEY

Thank you. Will you help me on with my cloak?

LORD GORING

With pleasure. [*Puts her cloak on.*]

MRS. CHEVELEY

Thanks. I am never going to try to harm Robert Chiltern again.

LORD GORING

Fortunately you have not the chance, Mrs. Cheveley.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Well, if even I had the chance, I wouldn't. On the contrary, I am going to render him a great service.

LORD GORING

I am charmed to hear it. It is a reformation.

MRS. CHEVELEY

Yes. I can't bear so upright a gentleman, so honourable an English gentleman, being so shamefully deceived, and so——

LORD GORING

Well?

MRS. CHEVELEY

I find that somehow Gertrude Chiltern's dying speech and confession has strayed into my pocket.

LORD GORING

What do you mean?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*With a bitter note of triumph in her voice.*] I mean that I am going to send Robert Chiltern the love letter his wife wrote to you to-night.

LORD GORING

Love letter?

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*Laughing.*] "I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you. Gertrude."

[*Lord Goring rushes to the bureau and takes the envelope, finds it empty, and turns round.*]

LORD GORING

You wretched woman, must you always be thieving? Give me back that letter. I'll take it from you by force. You shall not leave my room till I have got it.

[*He rushes towards her, but Mrs. Cheveley at once puts her hand on the electric bell that is on the table. The bell sounds with shrill reverberations, and Phipps enters.*]

MRS. CHEVELEY

[*After a pause.*] Lord Goring merely rang that you should show me out. Good-night, Lord Goring!

[*Goes out, followed by Phipps. Her face is illumined with evil triumph. There is joy in her eyes. Youth seems to have come back to her. Her last glance is like a swift arrow. Lord Goring bites his lip, and lights a cigarette.*]

ACT-DROP.

FOURTH ACT.

SCENE—*Same as Act II.*

[*Lord Goring is standing by the fireplace with his hands in his pockets. He is looking rather bored.*]

LORD GORING

[*Pulls out his watch, inspects it, and rings the bell.*] It is a great nuisance. I can't find anyone in this house to talk to. And I am full of interesting information. I feel like the latest edition of something or other.

[*Enter servant.*]

JAMES

Sir Robert is still at the Foreign Office, my lord.

LORD GORING

Lady Chiltern not down yet?

JAMES

Her ladyship has not yet left her room. Miss Chiltern has just come in from riding.

LORD GORING

[*To himself.*] Ah! that is something.

JAMES

Lord Caversham has been waiting some time in the library for Sir Robert. I told him your lordship was here.

LORD GORING

Thank you. Would you kindly tell him I've gone?

JAMES

[*Bowing.*] I shall do so, my lord.

[*Exit Servant.*]

LORD GORING

Really, I don't want to meet my father three days running. It is a great deal too much excitement for any son. I hope to goodness he won't come up. Fathers should be neither seen

nor heard. That is the only proper basis for family life. Mothers are different. Mothers are darlings. [*Throws himself down into a chair, picks up a paper and begins to read it.*]

[*Enter Lord Caversham.*]

LORD CAVERSHAM

Well, sir, what are you doing here? Wasting your time as usual, I suppose?

LORD GORING

[*Throws down paper and rises.*] My dear father, when one pays a visit it is for the purpose of wasting other people's time, not one's own.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Have you been thinking over what I spoke to you about last night?

LORD GORING

I have been thinking about nothing else.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Engaged to be married yet?

LORD GORING

[*Genially.*] Not yet: but I hope to be before lunch-time.

LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Caustically.*] You can have till dinner-time if it would be of any convenience to you.

LORD GORING

Thanks awfully, but I think I'd sooner be engaged before lunch.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Humph! Never know when you are serious or not.

LORD GORING

Neither do I, father.

[*A pause.*]

LORD CAVERSHAM

I suppose you have read "The Times" this morning?

LORD GORING

[*Airily.*] "The Times"? Certainly not. I only read "The Morning Post." All that one should know about modern life is where the Duchesses are; anything else is quite demoralizing.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Do you mean to say you have not read "The Times's" leading articles on Robert Chiltern's career?

LORD GORING

Good heavens! No. What does it say?

LORD CAVERSHAM

What should it say, sir? Everything complimentary, of course. Chiltern's speech last night on this Argentine Canal Scheme was one of the finest pieces of oratory ever delivered in the House since Canning.

LORD GORING

Ah! Never heard of Canning. Never wanted to. And did . . . did Chiltern uphold the scheme?

LORD CAVERSHAM

Uphold it, sir? How little you know him! Why, he denounced it roundly, and the whole system of modern political finance. This speech is the turning-point in his career, as "The Times" points out. You should read this article sir. [*Opens "The Times."*] "Sir Robert

Chiltern . . . most rising of all our young statesmen . . . Brilliant orator . . . Unblemished career . . . Well-known integrity of character . . . Represents what is best in English public life . . . Noble contrast to the lax morality so common among foreign politicians.'' They will never say that of you, sir.

LORD GORING

I sincerely hope not, father. However, I am delighted at what you tell me about Robert, thoroughly delighted. It shows he has got pluck.

LORD CAVERSHAM

He has got more than pluck, sir, he has got genius.

LORD GORING

Ah! I prefer pluck. It is not so common, nowadays, as genius is.

LORD CAVERSHAM

I wish you would go into Parliament?

LORD GORING

My dear father, only people who look dull

ever get into the House of Commons, and only people who are dull ever succeed there.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Why don't you try to do something useful in life?

LORD GORING

I am far too young.

LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Testily.*] I hate this affectation of youth, sir. It is a great deal too prevalent nowadays.

LORD GORING

Youth isn't an affectation. Youth is an art.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Why don't you propose to that pretty Miss Chiltern?

LORD GORING

I am of a very nervous disposition, especially in the morning.

LORD CAVERSHAM

I don't suppose there is the smallest chance of her accepting you.

LORD GORING

I don't know how the betting stands to-day.

LORD CAVERSHAM

If she did accept you she would be the prettiest fool in England.

LORD GORING

That is just what I should like to marry. A thoroughly sensible wife would reduce me to a condition of absolute idiocy in less than six months.

LORD CAVERSHAM

You don't deserve her, sir.

LORD GORING

My dear father, if we men married the women we deserved, we should have a very bad time of it.

[*Enter Mabel Chiltern.*]

MABEL CHILTERN

Oh! . . . How do you do, Lord Caversham? I hope Lady Caversham is quite well?

LORD CAVERSHAM

Lady Caversham is as usual, as usual.

LORD GORING

Good morning, Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Taking no notice at all of Lord Goring, and addressing herself exclusively to Lord Caversham.*] And Lady Caversham's bonnets . . . are they at all better?

LORD CAVERSHAM

They have had a serious relapse, I am sorry to say.

LORD GORING

Good morning, Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN

[*To Lord Caversham.*] I hope an operation will not be necessary.

LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Smiling at her pertness.*] If it is we shall have to give Lady Caversham a narcotic. Otherwise she would never consent to have a feather touched.

LORD GORING

[*With increased emphasis.*] Good morning, Miss Mabel!

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Turning round with feigned surprise.*] Oh, are you here? Of course you understand that after your breaking your appointment I am never going to speak to you again.

LORD GORING

Oh, please don't say such a thing. You are the one person in London I really like to have to listen to me.

MABEL CHILTERN

Lord Goring, I never believe a single word that either you or I say to each other.

LORD CAVERSHAM

You are quite right, my dear, quite right . . . as far as he is concerned, I mean.

MABEL CHILTERN

Do you think you could possibly make your son behave a little better occasionally? Just as a change.

LORD CAVERSHAM

I regret to say, Miss Chiltern, that I have no influence at all over my son. I wish I had. If I had, I know what I would make him do.

MABEL CHILTERN

I am afraid that he has one of those terribly weak natures that are not susceptible to influence.

LORD CAVERSHAM

He is very heartless, very heartless.

LORD GORING

It seems to me that I am a little in the way here.

MABEL CHILTERN

It is very good for you to be in the way, and to know what people say of you behind your back.

LORD GORING

I don't at all like knowing what people say of me behind my back. It makes me far too conceited.

LORD CAVERSHAM

After that, my dear, I really must bid you good morning.

MABEL CHILTERN

Oh! I hope you are not going to leave me all alone with Lord Goring? Especially at such an early hour in the day.

LORD CAVERSHAM

I am afraid I can't take him with me to Downing Street. It is not the Prime Minister's day for seeing the unemployed.

[*Shakes hands with Mabel Chiltern, takes up his hat and stick, and goes out, with a parting glare of indignation at Lord Goring.*]

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Takes up roses and begins to arrange them in a bowl on the table.*] People who don't keep their appointments in the Park are horrid.

LORD GORING

Detestable.

MABEL CHILTERN

I am glad you admit it. But I wish you wouldn't look so pleased about it.

LORD GORING

I can't help it. I always look pleased when I am with you.

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Sadly.*] Then I suppose it is my duty to remain with you?

LORD GORING

Of course it is.

MABEL CHILTERN

Well, my duty is a thing I never do, on principle. It always depresses me. So I am afraid I must leave you.

LORD GORING

Please don't, Miss Mabel. I have something very particular to say to you.

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Rapturously.*] Oh! is it a proposal?

LORD GORING

[*Somewhat taken aback.*] Well, yes, it is—I am bound to say it is.

MABEL CHILTERN

[*With a sigh of pleasure.*] I am so glad. That makes the second to-day.

LORD GORING

[*Indignantly.*] The second to-day? What conceited ass has been impertinent enough to dare to propose to you before I had proposed to you?

MABEL CHILTERN

Tommy Trafford, of course. It is one of Tommy's days for proposing. He always proposes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, during the season.

LORD GORING

You didn't accept him, I hope?

MABEL CHILTERN

I make it a rule never to accept Tommy. That is why he goes on proposing. Of course, as you didn't turn up this morning, I very nearly said yes. It would have been an excellent lesson both for him and for you if I had. It would have taught you both better manners.

LORD GORING

Oh! bother Tommy Trafford. Tommy is a silly little ass. I love you.

MABEL CHILTERN

I know. And I think you might have mentioned it before. I am sure I have given you heaps of opportunities.

LORD GORING

Mabel, do be serious. Please be serious.

MABEL CHILTERN

Ah! that is the sort of thing a man always says to a girl before he has been married to her. He never says it afterwards.

LORD GORING

[*Taking hold of her hand.*] Mabel, I have told you that I love you. Can't you love me a little in return?

MABEL CHILTERN

You silly Arthur! If you knew anything about . . . anything, which you don't, you would know that I adore you. Everyone in London knows it except you. It is a public scandal the way I adore you. I have been going

about for the last six months telling the whole of society that I adore you. I wonder you consent to have anything to say to me. I have no character left at all. At least, I feel so happy that I am quite sure I have no character left at all.

LORD GORING

[*Catches her in his arms and kisses her. Then there is a pause of bliss.*] Dear! Do you know I was awfully afraid of being refused!

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Looking up at him.*] But you never have been refused yet by anybody, have you, Arthur? I can't imagine anyone refusing you.

LORD GORING

[*After kissing her again.*] Of course I'm not nearly good enough for you, Mabel.

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Nestling close to him.*] I am so glad, darling. I was afraid you were.

LORD GORING

[*After some hesitation.*] And I'm . . . I'm a little over thirty.

MABEL CHILTERN

Dear, you look weeks younger that that.

LORD GORING

[*Enthusiastically.*] How sweet of you to say so! . . . And it is only fair to tell you frankly that I am fearfully extravagant.

MABEL CHILTERN

But so am I, Arthur. So we're sure to agree. And now I must go and see Gertrude.

LORD GORING

Must you really? [*Kisses her.*]

MABEL CHILTERN

Yes.

LORD GORING

Then do tell her I want to talk to her particularly. I have been waiting here all the morning to see either her or Robert.

MABEL CHILTERN

Do you mean to say you didn't come here expressly to propose to me?

LORD GORING

[*Triumphantly.*] No, that was a flash of genius.

MABEL CHILTERN

Your first.

LORD GORING

[*With determination.*] My last.

MABEL CHILTERN

I am delighted to hear it. Now don't stir. I'll be back in five minutes. And don't fall into any temptations while I am away.

LORD GORING

Dear Mabel, while you are away, there are none. It makes me horribly dependent on you.

[*Enter Lady Chiltern.*]

LADY CHILTERN

Good morning, dear. How pretty you are looking!

MABEL CHILTERN

How pale you are looking, Gertrude! It is most becoming!

LADY CHILTERN

Good morning, Lord Goring!

LORD GORING

[*Bowing.*] Good morning, Lady Chiltern!

MABEL CHILTERN

[*Aside to Lord Goring.*] I shall be in the conservatory, under the second palm tree on the left.

LORD GORING

Second on the left?

MABEL CHILTERN

[*With a look of mock surprise.*] Yes; the usual palm tree.

[*Blows a kiss to him, unobserved by Lady Chiltern, and goes out.*]

LORD GORING

Lady Chiltern, I have a certain amount of very good news to tell you. Mrs. Cheveley gave me up Robert's letter last night, and I burned it. Robert is safe.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Sinking on the sofa.*] Safe! Oh! I am

so glad of that. What a good friend you are to him—to us!

LORD GORING

There is only one person now that could be said to be in any danger.

LADY CHILTERN

Who is that?

LORD GORING

[*Sitting down beside her.*] Yourself.

LADY CHILTERN

I! In danger? What do you mean?

LORD GORING

Danger is too great a word. It is a word I should not have used. But I admit I have something to tell you that may distress you, that terribly distresses me. Yesterday evening you wrote me a very beautiful, womanly letter, asking me for my help. You wrote to me as one of your oldest friends, one of your husband's oldest friends. Mrs. Cheveley stole that letter from my rooms.

LADY CHILTERN

Well, what use is it to her? Why should she not have it?

LORD GORING

[*Rising.*] Lady Chiltern, I will be quite frank with you. Mrs. Cheveley puts a certain construction on that letter and proposes to send it to your husband.

LADY CHILTERN

But what construction could she put on it? . . . Oh! not that! not that! If I in—in trouble, and wanting your help, trusting you, propose to come to you . . . that you may advise me . . . assist me . . . Oh! are there women so horrible as that . . . ? And she proposes to send it to my husband? Tell me what happened. Tell me all that happened.

LORD GORING

Mrs. Cheveley was concealed in a room adjoining my library, without my knowledge. I thought that the person who was waiting in that room to see me was yourself. Robert came in unexpectedly. A chair or something fell in the room. He forced his way in, and he discovered her. We had a terrible scene. I still thought

it was you. He left me in anger. At the end of everything Mrs. Cheveley got possession of your letter—she stole it, when or how, I don't know.

LADY CHILTERN

At what hour did this happen?

LORD GORING

At half-past ten. And now I propose that we tell Robert the whole thing at once.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Looking at him with amazement that is almost terror.*] You want me to tell Robert that the woman you expected was not Mrs. Cheveley, but myself? That it was I whom you thought was concealed in a room in your house, at half-past ten o'clock at night? You want me to tell him that?

LORD GORING

I think it is better that he should know the exact truth.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Rising.*] Oh, I couldn't, I couldn't!

LORD GORING

May I do it?

LADY CHILTERN

No.

LORD GORING

[*Gravely.*] You are wrong, Lady Chiltern.

LADY CHILTERN

No. The letter must be intercepted. That is all. But how can I do it? Letters arrive for him every moment of the day. His secretaries open them and hand them to him. I dare not ask the servants to bring me his letters. It would be impossible. Oh! why don't you tell me what to do?

LORD GORING

Pray be calm, Lady Chiltern, and answer the questions I am going to put to you. You said his secretaries open his letters.

LADY CHILTERN

Yes.

LORD GORING

Who is with him to-day? Mr. Trafford, isn't it?

LADY CHILTERN

No. Mr. Montfort, I think.

LORD GORING

You can trust him?

LADY CHILTERN

[*With a gesture of despair.*] Oh! how do I know?

LORD GORING

He would do what you asked him, wouldn't he?

LADY CHILTERN

I think so.

LORD GORING

Your letter was on pink paper. He could recognize it without reading it, couldn't he? By the colour?

LADY CHILTERN

I suppose so.

LORD GORING

Is he in the house now?

LADY CHILTERN

Yes.

LORD GORING

Then I will go and see him myself, and tell him that a certain letter, written on pink paper, is to be forwarded to Robert to-day, and that at all costs it must not reach him. [*Goes to the door, and opens it.*] Oh! Robert is coming upstairs with the letter in his hand. It has reached him already.

LADY CHILTERN

[*With a cry of pain.*] Oh! you have saved his life; what have you done with mine!

[*Enter Sir Robert Chiltern. He has the letter in his hand, and is reading it. He comes towards his wife, not noticing Lord Goring's presence.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

"I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you. Gertrude." Oh, my love! Is this true? Do you indeed trust me, and want me? If so, it was for me to come to you, not for you to

write of coming to me. This letter of yours, Gertrude, makes me feel that nothing that the world may do can hurt me now. You want me, Gertrude?

[*Lord Goring, unseen by Sir Robert Chiltern, makes an imploring sign to Lady Chiltern to accept the situation and Sir Robert's error.*]

LADY CHILTERN

Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

You trust me, Gertrude?

LADY CHILTERN

Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Ah! why did you not add you loved me?

LADY CHILTERN

[*Taking his hand.*] Because I loved you.

[*Lord Goring passes into the conservatory.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Kisses her.*] Gertrude, you don't know what I feel. When Montfort passed me your letter across the table—he had opened it by mistake,

I suppose, without looking at the handwriting on the envelope—and I read it—oh! I did not care what disgrace or punishment was in store for me, I only thought you loved me still.

LADY CHILTERN

There is no disgrace in store for you, nor any public shame. Mrs. Cheveley has handed over to Lord Goring the document that was in her possession, and he has destroyed it.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Are you sure of this, Gertrude?

LADY CHILTERN

Yes; Lord Goring has just told me.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Then I am safe! Oh! what a wonderful thing to be safe! For two days I have been in terror. I am safe now. How did Arthur destroy my letter? Tell me.

LADY CHILTERN

He burned it.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I wish I had seen that one sin of my youth

burning to ashes. How many men there are in modern life who would like to see their past burning to white ashes before them! Is Arthur still here?

LADY CHILTERN

Yes; he is in the conservatory.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I am so glad now I made that speech last night in the House, so glad. I made it thinking that public disgrace might be the result. But it has not been so.

LADY CHILTERN

Public honour has been the result.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I think so. I fear so, almost. For although I am safe from detection, although every proof against me is destroyed, I suppose, Gertrude . . . I suppose I should retire from public life? [*He looks anxiously at his wife.*]

LADY CHILTERN

[*Eagerly.*] Oh yes, Robert, you should do that. It is your duty to do that.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

It is much to surrender.

LADY CHILTERN

No; it will be much to gain.

[*Sir Robert Chiltern walks up and down the room with a troubled expression. Then comes over to his wife, and puts his hand on her shoulder.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

And you would be happy living somewhere alone with me, abroad perhaps, or in the country away from London, away from public life? You would have no regrets?

LADY CHILTERN

Oh! none, Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Sadly.*] And your ambition for me? You used to be ambitious for me.

LADY CHILTERN

Oh! my ambition! I have none now, but that we two may love each other. It was your ambition that led you astray. Let us not talk about ambition.

[*Lord Goring returns from the conservatory, looking very pleased with himself, and with an entirely new buttonhole that some one has made for him.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Going towards him.*] Arthur, I have to thank you for what you have done for me. I don't know how I can repay you. [*Shakes hands with him.*]

LORD GORING

My dear fellow, I'll tell you at once. At the present moment, under the usual palm tree . . . I mean in the conservatory . . .

[*Enter Mason.*]

MASON

Lord Caversham.

LORD GORING

That admirable father of mine really makes a habit of turning up at the wrong moment. It is very heartless of him, very heartless indeed.

[*Enter Lord Caversham. Mason goes out.*]

LORD CAVERSHAM

Good morning, Lady Chiltern! Warmest con-

gratulations to you, Chiltern, on your brilliant speech last night. I have just left the Prime Minister, and you are to have the vacant seat in the Cabinet.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*With a look of joy and triumph.*] A seat in the Cabinet?

LORD CAVERSHAM

Yes; here is the Prime Minister's letter. [*Hands letter.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Takes letter and reads.*] A seat in the Cabinet!

LORD CAVERSHAM

Certainly, and you well deserve it too. You have got what we want so much in political life nowadays—high character, high moral tone, high principles. [*To Lord Goring.*] Everything that you have not got, sir, and never will have.

LORD GORING

I don't like principles, father, I prefer prejudices.

[*Sir Robert Chiltern is on the brink of accepting the Prime Minister's offer, when he sees his wife looking at him with her clear, candid eyes. He then realizes that it is impossible.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I cannot accept this offer, Lord Caversham. I have made up my mind to decline it.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Decline it, sir!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

My intention is to retire at once from public life.

LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Angrily.*] Decline a seat in the Cabinet, and retire from public life? Never heard such damned nonsense in the whole course of my existence. I beg your pardon, Lady Chiltern. Chiltern, I beg your pardon. [*To Lord Goring.*] Don't grin like that, sir.

LORD GORING

No, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Lady Chiltern, you are a sensible woman, the

most sensible woman in London, the most sensible woman I know. Will you kindly prevent your husband from making such a . . . from talking such . . . Will you kindly do that, Lady Chiltern?

LADY CHILTERN

I think my husband is right in his determination, Lord Caversham. I approve of it.

LORD CAVERSHAM

You approve of it? Good Heavens!

LADY CHILTERN

[*Taking her husband's hand.*] I admire him for it. I admire him immensely for it. I have never admired him so much before. He is finer than even I thought him. [*To Sir Robert Chiltern.*] You will go and write your letter to the Prime Minister now, won't you? Don't hesitate about it, Robert.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*With a touch of bitterness.*] I suppose I had better write it at once. Such offers are not repeated. I will ask you to excuse me for a moment, Lord Caversham.

LADY CHILTERN

I may come with you, Robert, may I not?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Yes, Gertrude.

[*Lady Chiltern goes out with him.*]

LORD CAVERSHAM

What is the matter with this family? Something wrong here, eh? [*Tapping his forehead.*] Idiocy? Hereditary, I suppose. Both of them, too. Wife as well as husband. Very sad. Very sad indeed! And they are not an old family. Can't understand it.

LORD GORING

It is not idiocy, father, I assure you.

LORD CAVERSHAM

What is it then, sir?

LORD GORING

[*After some hesitation.*] Well, it is what is called nowadays a high moral tone, father. That is all.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Hate these new-fangled names. Same thing

as we used to call idiocy fifty years ago. Shan't stay in this house any longer.

LORD GORING

[*Taking his arm.*] Oh! just go in here for a moment, father. Third palm tree to the left, the usual palm tree.

LORD CAVERSHAM

What, sir?

LORD GORING

I beg your pardon, father, I forgot. The conservatory, father, the conservatory—there is some one there I want you to talk to.

LORD CAVERSHAM

What about, sir?

LORD GORING

About me, father.

LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Grimly.*] Not a subject on which much eloquence is possible.

LORD GORING

No, father; but the lady is like me. She

doesn't care much for eloquence in others. She thinks it a little loud.

[*Lord Caversham goes into the conservatory. Lady Chiltern enters.*]

LORD GORING

Lady Chiltern, why are you playing Mrs. Cheveley's cards?

LADY CHILTERN

[*Startled.*] I don't understand you.

LORD GORING

Mrs. Cheveley made an attempt to ruin your husband. Either to drive him from public life, or to make him adopt a dishonourable position. From the latter tragedy you saved him. The former you are now thrusting on him. Why should you do him the wrong Mrs. Cheveley tried to do and failed?

LADY CHILTERN

Lord Goring?

LORD GORING

[*Pulling himself together for a great effort, and showing the philosopher that underlies the dandy.*] Lady Chiltern, allow me. You wrote

me a letter last night in which you said you trusted me and wanted my help. Now is the moment when you really want my help, now is the time when you have got to trust me, to trust in my counsel and judgment. You love Robert. Do you want to kill his love for you? What sort of existence will he have if you rob him of the fruits of his ambition, if you take him from the splendour of a great political career, if you close the doors of public life against him, if you condemn him to sterile failure, he who was made for triumph and success? Women are not meant to judge us, but to forgive us when we need forgiveness. Pardon, not punishment, is their mission. Why should you scourge him with rods for a sin done in his youth, before he knew you, before he knew himself? A man's life is of more value than a woman's. It has larger issues, wider scope, greater ambitions. A woman's life revolves in curves of emotions. It is upon lines of intellect that a man's life progresses. Don't make any terrible mistake, Lady Chiltern. A woman who can keep a man's love, and love him in return, has done all the world wants of women, or should want of them.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Troubled and hesitating.*] But it is my husband himself who wishes to retire from public life. He feels it is his duty. It was he who first said so.

LORD GORING

Rather than lose your love, Robert would do anything, wreck his whole career, as he is on the brink of doing now. He is making for you a terrible sacrifice. Take my advice, Lady Chiltern, and do not accept a sacrifice so great. If you do, you will live to repent it bitterly. We men and women are not made to accept such sacrifices from each other. We are not worthy of them. Besides, Robert has been punished enough.

LADY CHILTERN

We have both been punished. I set him up too high.

LORD GORING

[*With deep feeling in his voice.*] Do not for that reason set him down now too low. If he has fallen from his altar, do not thrust him into the mire. Failure to Robert would be the very

mire of shame. Power is his passion. He would lose everything, even his power to feel love. Your husband's life is at this moment in your hands, your husband's love is in your hands. Don't mar both for him.

[*Enter Sir Robert Chiltern.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Gertrude, here is the draft of my letter. Shall I read it to you?

LADY CHILTERN

Let me see it.

[*Sir Robert hands her the letter. She reads it, and then, with a gesture of passion, tears it up.*]

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

What are you doing?

LADY CHILTERN

A man's life is of more value than a woman's. It has larger issues, wider scope, greater ambitions. Our lives revolve in curves of emotions. It is upon lines of intellect that a man's life progresses. I have just learnt this, and much else with it, from Lord Goring. And I will not

spoil your life for you, nor see you spoil it as a sacrifice to me, a useless sacrifice!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Gertrude! Gertrude!

LADY CHILTERN

You can forget. Men easily forget. And I forgive. That is how women help the world. I see that now.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Deeply overcome by emotion, embraces her.*] My wife! my wife! [*To Lord Goring.*] Arthur, it seems that I am always to be in your debt.

LORD GORING

Oh, dear no, Robert! Your debt is to Lady Chiltern, not to me!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

I owe you much. And now tell me what you were going to ask me just now as Lord Caversham came in.

LORD GORING

Robert, you are your sister's guardian, and I want your consent to my marriage with her. That is all.

LADY CHILTERN

Oh, I am so glad! I am so glad! [*Shakes hands with Lord Goring.*]

LORD GORING

Thank you, Lady Chiltern.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*With a troubled look.*] My sister to be your wife?

LORD GORING

Yes.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Speaking with great firmness.*] Arthur, I am very sorry, but the thing it quite out of the question. I have to think of Mabel's future happiness. And I don't think her happiness would be safe in your hands. And I cannot have her sacrificed!

LORD GORING

Sacrificed!

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Yes, utterly sacrificed. Loveless marriages are horrible. But there is one thing worse than

an absolutely loveless marriage. A marriage in which there is love, but on one side only; faith, but on one side only; devotion, but on one side only, and in which of the two hearts one is sure to be broken.

LORD GORING

But I love Mabel. No other woman has any place in my life.

LADY CHILTERN

Robert, if they love each other, why should they not be married?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Arthur cannot bring Mabel the love that she deserves.

LORD GORING

What reason have you for saying that?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*After a pause.*] Do you really require me to tell you?

LORD GORING

Certainly I do.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

As you choose. When I called on you yesterday evening I found Mrs. Cheveley concealed in your rooms. It was between ten and eleven o'clock at night. I do not wish to say anything more. Your relations with Mrs. Cheveley have as I said to you last night, nothing whatsoever to do with me. I know you were engaged to be married to her once. The fascination she exercised over you then seems to have returned. You spoke to me last night of her as of a woman pure and stainless, a woman whom you respected and honoured. That may be so. But I cannot give my sister's life into your hands. It would be wrong of me. It would be unjust, infamously unjust to her.

LORD GORING

I have nothing more to say.

LADY CHILTERN

Robert, it was not Mrs. Cheveley whom Lord Goring expected last night.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

Not Mrs. Cheveley! Who was it then?

LORD GORING

Lady Chiltern.

LADY CHILTERN

It was your own wife. Robert, yesterday afternoon Lord Goring told me that if ever I was in trouble I could come to him for help, as he was our oldest and best friend. Later on, after that terrible scene in this room, I wrote to him telling him that I trusted him, that I had need of him, that I was coming to him for help and advice. [*Sir Robert Chiltern takes the letter out of his pocket.*] Yes, that letter. I didn't go to Lord Goring's after all. I felt that it is from ourselves alone that help can come. Pride made me think that. Mrs. Cheveley went. She stole my letter and sent it anonymously to you this morning, that you should think . . . Oh! Robert, I cannot tell you what she wished you to think. . . .

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

What! Had I fallen so low in your eyes that you thought that even for a moment I could have doubted your goodness? Gertrude, Gertrude, you are to me the white image of all good things, and sin can never touch you. Arthur,

you can go to Mabel, and you have my best wishes! Oh! stop a moment. There is no name at the beginning of this letter. The brilliant Mrs. Cheveley does not seem to have noticed that. There should be a name.

LADY CHILTERN

Let me write yours. It is you I trust and need. You and none else.

LORD GORING

Well, really, Lady Chiltern, I think I should have back my own letter.

LADY CHILTERN

[*Smiling.*] No; you shall have Mabel. [*Takes the letter and writes her husband's name on it.*]

LORD GORING

Well, I hope she hasn't changed her mind. It's nearly twenty minutes since I saw her last.

[*Enter Mabel Chiltern and Lord Caversham.*]

MABEL CHILTERN

Lord Goring, I think your father's conversation much more improving than yours. I am only going to talk to Lord Caversham in the future, and always under the usual palm tree.

LORD GORING

Darling! [*Kisses her.*]

LORD CAVERSHAM

[*Considerably taken aback.*] What does this mean, sir? You don't mean to say that this charming, clever young lady, has been so foolish as to accept you?

LORD GORING

Certainly, father! And Chiltern's been wise enough to accept the seat in the Cabinet.

LORD CAVERSHAM

I am very glad to hear that, Chiltern . . . I congratulate you, sir. If the country doesn't go to the dogs or the Radicals, we shall have you Prime Minister, some day.

[*Enter Mason.*]

MASON

Luncheon is on the table, my Lady!

[*Mason goes out.*]

LADY CHILTERN

You'll stop to luncheon, Lord Caversham, won't you?

LORD CAVERSHAM

With pleasure, and I'll drive you down to Downing Street afterwards, Chiltern. You have a great future before you, a great future. Wish I could say the same for you, sir. [*To Lord Goring.*] But your career will have to be entirely domestic.

LORD GORING

Yes, father, I prefer it domestic.

LORD CAVERSHAM

And if you don't make this young lady an ideal husband, I'll cut you off with a shilling.

MABEL CHILTERN

An ideal husband! Oh, I don't think I should like that. It sounds like something in the next world.

LORD CAVERSHAM

What do you want him to be then, dear?

MABEL CHILTERN

He can be what he chooses. All I want is to be . . . to be . . . oh! a real wife to him.

LORD CAVERSHAM

Upon my word, there is a good deal of common sense in that, Lady Chiltern.

[*They all go out except Sir Robert Chiltern. He sinks into a chair, wrapt in thought. After a little time Lady Chiltern returns to look for him.*]

LADY CHILTERN

[*Leaning over the back of the chair.*] Aren't you coming in, Robert?

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN

[*Taking her hand.*] Gertrude, is it love you feel for me, or is it pity merely?

LADY CHILTERN

[*Kisses him.*] It is love, Robert. Love, and only love. For both of us a new life is beginning.

CURTAIN.

PART VI

Salome:

A Tragedy in One Act:

Translated from the French of Oscar Wilde

To My Friend
Lord Alfred Bruce Douglas
the Translator of
My Play

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY.

HEROD ANTIPAS, Tetrarch of Judæa

IOKANAAN, The Prophet

THE YOUNG SYRIAN, Captain of the Guard

TIGELLINUS, A young Roman

A CAPPADOCIAN

A NUBIAN

FIRST SOLDIER

SECOND SOLDIER

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

JEWS, NAZARENES, ETC.

A SLAVE

NAAMAN, The Executioner

HERODIAS, Wife of the Tetrarch

SALOME, Daughter of Herodias

THE SLAVES OF SALOME

SALOME.

SCENE—*A great terrace in the Palace of Herod, set above the banqueting hall. Some soldiers are leaning over the balcony. To the right there is a gigantic staircase, to the left, at the back, an old cistern surrounded by a wall of green bronze. The moon is shining very brightly.*

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

How beautiful is the Princess Salome to-night!

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

Look at the moon. How strange the moon seems! She is like a woman rising from a tomb. She is like a dead woman. One might fancy she was looking for dead things.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

She has a strange look. She is like a little princess who wears a yellow veil, and whose feet are of silver. She is like a princess who has little white doves for feet. One might fancy she was dancing.

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

She is like a woman who is dead. She moves very slowly.

[*Noise in the banqueting-hall.*]

FIRST SOLDIER

What an uproar! Who are those wild beasts howling?

SECOND SOLDIER

The Jews. They are always like that. They are disputing about their religion.

FIRST SOLDIER

Why do they dispute about their religion?

SECOND SOLDIER

I cannot tell. They are always doing it. The Pharisees, for instance, say that there are angels, and the Sadducees declare that angels do not exist.

FIRST SOLDIER

I think it is ridiculous to dispute about such things.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

How beautiful is the Princess Salome to-night!

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

You are always looking at her. You look at her too much. It is dangerous to look at people in such fashion. Something terrible may happen.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

She is very beautiful to-night.

FIRST SOLDIER

The Tetrarch has a sombre aspect.

SECOND SOLDIER

Yes; he has a sombre aspect.

FIRST SOLDIER

He is looking at something.

SECOND SOLDIER

He is looking at some one.

FIRST SOLDIER

At whom is he looking?

SECOND SOLDIER

I cannot tell.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

How pale the Princess is! Never have I seen her so pale. She is like the shadow of a white rose in a mirror of silver.

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

You must not look at her. You look too much at her.

FIRST SOLDIER

Herodias has filled the cup of the Tetrarch.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

Is that the Queen Herodias, she who wears a black mitre sewed with pearls, and whose hair is powdered with blue dust?

FIRST SOLDIER

Yes; that is Herodias, the Tetrarch's wife.

SECOND SOLDIER

The Tetrarch is very fond of wine. He has wine of three sorts. One which is brought from

the Island of Samothrace, and is purple like the cloak of Cæsar.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

I have never seen Cæsar.

SECOND SOLDIER

Another that comes from a town called Cyprus, and is as yellow as gold.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

I love gold.

SECOND SOLDIER

And the third is a wine of Sicily. That wine is as red as blood.

THE NUBIAN

The gods of my country are very fond of blood. Twice in the year we sacrifice to them young men and maidens: fifty young men and a hundred maidens. But I am afraid that we never give them quite enough, for they are very harsh to us.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

In my country there are no gods left. The Romans have driven them out. There are some who say that they have hidden themselves in the

mountains, but I do not believe it. Three nights I have been on the mountains seeking them everywhere. I did not find them, and at last I called them by their names, and they did not come. I think they are dead.

FIRST SOLDIER

The Jews worship a God that one cannot see.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

I cannot understand that.

FIRST SOLDIER

In fact, they only believe in things that one cannot see.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

That seems to me altogether ridiculous.

THE VOICE OF IOKANAAN

After me shall come another mightier than I. I am not worthy so much as to unloose the latchet of his shoes. When he cometh the solitary places shall be glad. They shall blossom like the rose. The eyes of the blind shall see the day, and the ears of the deaf shall be opened. The sucking child shall put his hand upon the dragon's lair, he shall lead the lions by their manes.

SECOND SOLDIER

Make him be silent. He is always saying ridiculous things.

FIRST SOLDIER

No, no. He is a holy man. He is very gentle, too. Every day when I give him to eat he thanks me.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

Who is he?

FIRST SOLDIER

A prophet.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

What is his name?

FIRST SOLDIER

Iokanaan.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

Whence comes he?

FIRST SOLDIER

From the desert, where he fed on locusts and wild honey. He was clothed in camel's hair, and round his loins he had a leathern belt. He

was very terrible to look upon. A great multitude used to follow him. He even had disciples.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

What is he talking of?.

FIRST SOLDIER

We can never tell. Sometimes he says things that affright one, but it is impossible to understand what he says.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

May one see him?

FIRST SOLDIER

No. The Tetrarch has forbidden it.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

The Princess has hidden her face behind her fan! Her little white hands are fluttering like doves that fly to their dove-cots. They are like white butterflies. They are just like white butterflies.

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

What is that to you? Why do you look at her? You must not look at her. . . . Something terrible may happen.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

[*Pointing to the cistern.*] What a strange prison!

SECOND SOLDIER

It is an old cistern.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

An old cistern! That must be a poisonous place in which to dwell!

SECOND SOLDIER

Oh no! For instance, the Tetrarch's brother, his elder brother, the first husband of Herodias the Queen, was imprisoned there for twelve years. It did not kill him. At the end of the twelve years he had to be strangled.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

Strangled? Who dared to do that?

SECOND SOLDIER

[*Pointing to the Executioner, a huge negro.*] That man yonder, Naaman.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

He was not afraid?

SECOND SOLDIER

Oh no! The Tetrarch sent him the ring.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

What ring?

SECOND SOLDIER

The death ring. So he was not afraid.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

Yet it is a terrible thing to strangle a king.

FIRST SOLDIER

Why? Kings have but one neck, like other folk.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

I think it terrible.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

The Princess is getting up! She is leaving the table! She looks very troubled. Ah, she is coming this way. Yes, she is coming towards us. How pale she is! Never have I seen her so pale.

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

Do not look at her. I pray you not to look at her.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

She is like a dove that has strayed. . . . She is like a narcissus trembling in the wind. . . . She is like a silver flower.

[*Enter Salome.*]

SALOME

I will not stay. I cannot stay. Why does the Tetrarch look at me all the while with his mole's eyes under his shaking eyelids? It is strange that the husband of my mother looks at me like that. I know not what it means. Of a truth I know it too well.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

You have left the feast, Princess?

SALOME

How sweet is the air here! I can breathe here! Within there are Jews from Jerusalem who are tearing each other in pieces over their foolish ceremonies, and barbarians who drink and drink and spill their wine on the pavement, and Greeks from Smyrna with painted eyes and painted cheeks, and frizzed hair curled in columns, and Egyptians silent and subtle, with long nails of jade and russet cloaks, and

Romans brutal and coarse, with their uncouth jargon. Ah! how I loathe the Romans! They are rough and common, and they give themselves the airs of noble lords.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Will you be seated, Princess.

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

Why do you speak to her? Oh! something terrible will happen. Why do you look at her?

SALOME

How good to see the moon! She is like a little piece of money, a little silver flower. She is cold and chaste. I am sure she is a virgin. She has the beauty of a virgin. Yes, she is a virgin. She has never defiled herself. She has never abandoned herself to men, like the other goddesses.

THE VOICE OF IOKANAAN

Behold! the Lord hath come. The Son of Man is at hand. The centaurs have hidden themselves in the rivers, and the nymphs have left the rivers, and are lying beneath the leaves in the forests.

SALOME

Who was that who cried out?

SECOND SOLDIER

The prophet, Princess.

SALOME

Ah, the prophet! He of whom the Tetrarch is afraid?

SECOND SOLDIER

We know nothing of that, Princess. It was the prophet Iokanaan who cried out.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Is it your pleasure that I bid them bring your litter, Princess? The night is fair in the garden.

SALOME

He says terrible things about my mother, does he not?

SECOND SOLDIER

We never understand what he says, Princess.

SALOME

Yes; he says terrible things about her.

[*Enter a Slave.*]

THE SLAVE

Princess, the Tetrarch prays you to return to the feast.

SALOME

I will not return.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Pardon me, Princess, but if you return not some misfortune may happen.

SALOME

Is he an old man, this prophet?

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Princess, it were better to return. Suffer me to lead you in.

SALOME

This prophet . . . is he an old man?

FIRST SOLDIER

No, Princess, he is quite young.

SECOND SOLDIER

One cannot be sure. There are those who say that he is Elias.

SALOME

Who is Elias?

SECOND SOLDIER

A prophet of this country in bygone days, Princess.

THE SLAVE

What answer may I give the Tetrarch from the Princess?

THE VOICE OF IOKANAAN

Rejoice not, O land of Palestine, because the rod of him who smote thee is broken. For from the seed of the serpent shall come a basilisk, and that which is born of it shall devour the birds.

SALOME

What a strange voice! I would speak with him.

FIRST SOLDIER

I fear it may not be, Princess. The Tetrarch does not suffer any one to speak with him. He has even forbidden the high priest to speak with him.

SALOME

I desire to speak with him.

FIRST SOLDIER

It is impossible, Princess.

SALOME

I will speak with him.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Would it not be better to return to the banquet?

SALOME

Bring forth this prophet.

[*Exit the Slave.*]

FIRST SOLDIER

We dare not, Princess.

SALOME

[*Approaching the cistern and looking down into it.*] How black it is, down there! It must be terrible to be in so black a hole! It is like a tomb. . . . [*To the soldiers.*] Did you not hear me? Bring out the prophet. I would look on him.

SECOND SOLDIER

Princess, I beg you, do not require this of us.

SALOME

You are making me wait upon your pleasure.

FIRST SOLDIER

Princess, our lives belong to you, but we cannot do what you have asked of us. And indeed, it is not of us that you should ask this thing.

SALOME

[*Looking at the young Syrian.*] Ah!

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

Oh! what is going to happen? I am sure that something terrible will happen.

SALOME

[*Going up to the young Syrian.*] Thou wilt do this thing for me, wilt thou not, Narraboth? Thou wilt do this thing for me. I have ever been kind towards thee. Thou wilt do it for me. I would but look at him, this strange prophet. Men have talked so much of him. Often I have heard the Tetrarch talk of him. I think he is afraid of him, the Tetrarch. Art thou, even thou, also afraid of him, Narraboth?

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

I fear him not, Princess; there is no man I fear. But the Tetrarch has formally forbidden that any man should raise the cover of this well.

SALOME

Thou wilt do this thing for me, Narraboth, and to-morrow when I pass in my litter beneath the gateway of the idol-sellers I will let fall for thee a little flower, a little green flower.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Princess, I cannot, I cannot.

SALOME

[*Smiling.*] Thou wilt do this thing for me, Narraboth. Thou knowest that thou wilt do this thing for me. And on the morrow when I shall pass in my litter by the bridge of the idol-buyers, I will look at thee through the muslin veils, I will look at thee, Narraboth, it may be I will smile at thee. Look at me, Narraboth, look at me. Ah! thou knowest that thou wilt do what I ask of thee. Thou knowest it. . . . I know that thou wilt do this thing.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

[*Signing to the third soldier.*] Let the prophet come forth. . . . The Princess Salome desires to see him.

SALOME

Ah!

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

Oh! How strange the moon looks! Like the hand of a dead woman who is seeking to cover herself with a shroud.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

She has a strange aspect! She is like a little princess, whose eyes are eyes of amber. Through the clouds of muslin she is smiling like a little princess. [*The prophet comes out of the cistern. Salome looks at him and steps slowly back.*]

IOKANAAN

Where is he whose cup of abominations is now full? Where is he, who in a robe of silver shall one day die in the face of all the people? Bid him come forth, that he may hear the voice of him who hath cried in the waste places and in the houses of kings.

SALOME

Of whom is he speaking?

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

No one can tell, Princess.

IOKANAAN

Where is she who saw the images of men painted on the walls, even the images of the Chaldæans painted with colours, and gave herself up unto the lust of her eyes, and sent ambassadors into the land of Chaldæa?

SALOME

It is of my mother that he is speaking.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Oh no, Princess.

SALOME

Yes: it is of my mother that he is speaking.

IOKANAAN

Where is she who gave herself unto the Captains of Assyria, who have baldricks on their loins, and crowns of many colours on their heads? Where is she who hath given herself to the young men of the Egyptians, who are clothed

in fine linen and hyacinth, whose shields are of gold, whose helmets are of silver, whose bodies are mighty? Go, bid her rise up from the bed of her abominations, from the bed of her incestuousness, that she may hear the words of him who prepareth the way of the Lord, that she may repent her of her iniquities. Though she will not repent, but will stick fast in her abominations, go bid her come, for the fan of the Lord is in His hand.

SALOME

Ah, but he is terrible, he is terrible!

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Do not stay here, Princess, I beseech you.

SALOME

It is his eyes above all that are terrible. They are like black holes burned by torches in a tapestry of Tyre. They are like the black caverns where the dragons live, the black caverns of Egypt in which the dragons make their lairs. They are like black lakes troubled by fantastic moons. . . . Do you think he will speak again?

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Do not stay here, Princess. I pray you do not stay here.

SALOME

How wasted he is! He is like a thin ivory statue. He is like an image of silver. I am sure he is chaste, as the moon is. He is like a moon-beam, like a shaft of silver. His flesh must be very cold, cold as ivory. . . . I would look closer at him.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

No, no, Princess!

SALOME

I must look at him closer.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Princess! Princess!

IOKANAAN

Who is this woman who is looking at me? I will not have her look at me. Wherefore doth she look at me, with her golden eyes, under her gilded eyelids? I know not who she is. I do not desire to know who she is. Bid her begone, It is not to her that I would speak.

SALOME

I am Salome, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judæa.

IOKANAAN

Back! daughter of Babylon! Come not near the chosen of the Lord. Thy mother hath filled the earth with the wine of her iniquities, and the cry of her sinning hath come up even to the ears of God.

SALOME

Speak again, Iokanaan. Thy voice is as music to mine ear.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Princess! Princess! Princess!

SALOME

Speak again! Speak again, Iokanaan, and tell me what I must do.

IOKANAAN

Daughter of Sodom, come not near me! But cover thy face with a veil, and scatter ashes upon thine head, and get thee to the desert, and seek out the Son of Man.

SALOME

Who is he, the Son of Man? Is he as beautiful as thou art, Iokanaan?

IOKANAAN

Get thee behind me! I hear in the palace the beating of the wings of the angel of death.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Princess, I beseech thee to go within.

IOKANAAN

Angel of the Lord God, what dost thou here with thy sword? Whom seekest thou in this palace? The day of him who shall die in a robe of silver has not yet come.

SALOME

Iokanaan!

IOKANAAN

Who speaketh?

SALOME

I am amorous of thy body, Iokanaan! Thy body is white, like the lilies of a field that the mower hath never mowed. Thy body is white like the snows that lie on the mountains of

Judæa, and come down into the valleys. The roses in the garden of the Queen of Arabia are not so white as thy body. Neither the roses of the garden of the Queen of Arabia, the garden of spices of the Queen of Arabia, nor the feet of the dawn when they light on the leaves, nor the breast of the moon when she lies on the breast of the sea. . . . There is nothing in the world so white as thy body. Suffer me to touch thy body.

IOKANAAN

Back! daughter of Babylon! By woman came evil into the world. Speak not to me. I will not listen to thee. I listen but to the voice of the Lord God.

SALOME

Thy body is hideous. It is like the body of a leper. It is like a plastered wall, where vipers have crawled; like a plastered wall where the scorpions have made their nest. It is like a whited sepulchre, full of loathsome things. It is horrible, thy body is horrible. It is of thy hair that I am enamoured, Iokanaan. Thy hair is like clusters of grapes, like the clusters of black grapes that hang from the vine-trees of Edom in

the land of the Edomites. Thy hair is like the cedars of Lebanon, like the great cedars of Lebanon that give their shade to the lions and to the robbers who would hide them by day. The long black nights, when the moon hides her face, when the stars are afraid, are not so black as thy hair. The silence that dwells in the forest is not so black. There is nothing in the world that is so black as thy hair. . . . Suffer me to touch thy hair.

IOKANAAN

Back, daughter of Sodom! Touch me not. Profane not the temple of the Lord God.

SALOME

Thy hair is horrible. It is covered with mire and dust. It is like a crown of thorns placed on thy head. It is like a knot of serpents coiled round thy neck. I love not thy hair. . . . It is thy mouth that I desire, Iokanaan. Thy mouth is like a band of scarlet on a tower of ivory. It is like a pomegranate cut in twain with a knife of ivory. The pomegranate flowers that blossom in the gardens of Tyre, and are redder than roses, are not so red. The red blasts of trumpets that herald the approach of kings, and make afraid

the enemy, are not so red. Thy mouth is redder than the feet of those who tread the wine in the wine-press. It is redder than the feet of the doves who inhabit the temples and are fed by the priests. It is redder than the feet of him who cometh from a forest where he hath slain a lion, and seen gilded tigers. Thy mouth is like a branch of coral that fishers have found in the twilight of the sea, the coral that they keep for the kings! . . . It is like the vermilion that the Moabites find in the mines of Moab, the vermilion that the kings take from them. It is like the bow of the King of the Persians, that is painted with vermilion, and is tipped with coral. There is nothing in the world so red as thy mouth. . . . Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.

IOKANAAN

Never! daughter of Babylon! Daughter of Sodom! never!

SALOME

I will kiss thy mouth, Iokanaan. I will kiss thy mouth.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Princess, Princess, thou who art like a garden

of myrrh, thou who art the dove of all doves, look not at this man, look not at him! Do not speak such words to him. I cannot endure it. . . . Princess, do not speak these things.

SALOME

I will kiss thy mouth, Iokanaan.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

Ah! [*He kills himself, and falls between Salome and Iokanaan.*]

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

The young Syrian has slain himself! The young captain has slain himself! He has slain himself who was my friend! I gave him a little box of perfumes and ear-rings wrought in silver, and now he has killed himself! Ah, did he not say that some misfortune would happen? I, too, said it, and it has come to pass. Well I knew that the moon was seeking a dead thing, but I knew not that it was he whom she sought. Ah! why did I not hide him from the moon? If I had hidden him in a cavern she would not have seen him.

FIRST SOLDIER

Princess, the young captain has just slain himself.

SALOME

Suffer me to kiss thy mouth, Iokanaan.

IOKANAAN

Art thou not afraid, daughter of Herodias? Did I not tell thee that I had heard in the palace the beating of the wings of the angel of death, and hath he not come, the angel of death?

SALOME

Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.

IOKANAAN

Daughter of adultery, there is but one who can save thee. It is He of whom I spake. Go seek Him. He is in a boat on the sea of Galilee, and He talketh with His disciples. Kneel down on the shore of the sea, and call unto Him by His name. When He cometh to thee, and to all who call on Him He cometh, bow thyself at His feet and ask of Him the remission of thy sins.

SALOME

Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.

IOKANAAN

Cursed be thou! daughter of an incestuous mother, be thou accursed!

SALOME

I will kiss thy mouth, Iokanaan.

IOKANAAN

I will not look at thee. Thou art accursed, Salome, thou art accursed. [*He goes down into the cistern.*]

SALOME

I will kiss thy mouth, Iokanaan; I will kiss thy mouth.

FIRST SOLDIER

We must bear away the body to another place. The Tetrarch does not care to see dead bodies, save the bodies of those whom he himself has slain.

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

He was my brother, and nearer to me than a brother. I gave him a little box full of perfumes, and a ring of agate that he wore always on his hand. In the evening we were wont to walk by the river, and among the almond-trees,

and he used to tell me of the things of his country. He spake ever very low. The sound of his voice was like the sound of the flute, of one who playeth upon the flute. Also he had much joy to gaze at himself in the river. I used to reproach him for that.

SECOND SOLDIER

You are right; we must hide the body. The Tetrarch must not see it.

FIRST SOLDIER

The Tetrarch will not come to this place. He never comes on the terrace. He is too much afraid of the prophet.

[*Enter Herod, Herodias, and all the Court.*]

HEROD

Where is Salome? Where is the Princess? Why did she not return to the banquet as I commanded her? Ah! there she is!

HERODIAS

You must not look at her! You are always looking at her!

HEROD

The moon has a strange look to-night. Has

she not a strange look? She is like a mad woman, a mad woman who is seeking everywhere for lovers. She is naked too. She is quite naked. The clouds are seeking to clothe her nakedness, but she will not let them. She shows herself naked in the sky. She reels through the clouds like a drunken woman. . . . I am sure she is looking for lovers. Does she not reel like a drunken woman? She is like a mad woman, is she not?

HERODIAS

No; the moon is like the moon, that is all. Let us go within. . . . We have nothing to do here.

HEROD

I will stay here! Manasseh, lay carpets there. Light torches. Bring forth the ivory tables, and the tables of jasper. The air here is sweet. I will drink more wine with my guests. We must show all honours to the ambassadors of Cæsar.

HERODIAS

It is not because of them that you remain.

HEROD

Yes; the air is very sweet. Come, Herodias,

our guests await us. Ah! I have slipped! I have slipped in blood! It is an ill omen. It is a very ill omen. Wherefore is there blood here? . . . and this body, what does this body here? Think you I am like the King of Egypt, who gives no feast to his guests but that he shows them a corpse? Whose is it? I will not look on it.

FIRST SOLDIER

It is our captain, sire. It is the young Syrian whom you made captain of the guard but three days gone.

HEROD

I issued no order that he should be slain.

SECOND SOLDIER

He slew himself, sire.

HEROD

For what reason? I had made him captain of my guard!

SECOND SOLDIER

We do not know, sire. But with his own hand he slew himself.

HEROD

That seems strange to me. I had thought it was but the Roman philosophers who slew themselves. Is it not true, Tigellinus, that the philosophers at Rome slay themselves?

TIGELLINUS

There be some who slay themselves, sire. They are the Stoics. The Stoics are people of no cultivation. They are ridiculous people. I myself regard them as being perfectly ridiculous.

HEROD

I also. It is ridiculous to kill one's-self.

TIGELLINUS

Everybody at Rome laughs at them. The Emperor has written a satire against them. It is recited everywhere.

HEROD

Ah! he has written a satire against them? Cæsar is wonderful. He can do everything. . . . It is strange that the young Syrian has slain himself. I am sorry he has slain himself. I am very sorry. For he was fair to look upon. He was even very fair. He had very languorous

eyes. I remember that I saw that he looked languorously at Salome. Truly, I thought he looked too much at her.

HERODIAS

There are others who look too much at her.

HEROD

His father was a king. I drave him from his kingdom. And of his mother, who was a queen, you made a slave, Herodias. So he was here as my guest, as it were, and for that reason I made him my captain. I am sorry he is dead. Ho! why have you left the body here? It must be taken to some other place. I will not look at it, —away with it! [*They take away the body.*] It is cold here. There is a wind blowing. Is there not a wind blowing?

HERODIAS

No; there is no wind.

HEROD

I tell you there is a wind that blows. . . . And I hear in the air something that is like the beating of wings, like the beating of vast wings. Do you not hear it?

HERODIAS

I hear nothing.

HEROD

I hear it no longer. But I heard it. It was the blowing of the wind. It has passed away. But no, I hear it again. Do you not hear it? It is just like a beating of wings.

HERODIAS

I tell you there is nothing. You are ill. Let us go within.

HEROD

I am not ill. It is your daughter who is sick to death. Never have I seen her so pale.

HERODIAS

I have told you not to look at her.

HEROD

Pour me forth wine. [*Wine is brought.*] Salome, come drink a little wine with me. I have here a wine that is exquisite. Cæsar himself sent it me. Dip into it thy little red lips, that I may drain the cup.

SALOME

I am not thirsty, Tetrarch.

HEROD

You hear how she answers me, this daughter of yours?

HERODIAS

She does right. Why are you always gazing at her?

HEROD

Bring me ripe fruits. [*Fruits are brought.*] Salome, come and eat fruits with me. I love to see in a fruit the mark of thy little teeth. Bite but a little of this fruit, that I may eat what is left.

SALOME

I am not hungry, Tetrarch.

HEROD

[*To Herodias.*] You see how you have brought up this daughter of yours.

HERODIAS

My daughter and I come of a royal race. As

for thee, thy father was a camel driver! He was a thief and a robber to boot!

HEROD

Thou liest!

HERODIAS

Thou knowest well that it is true.

HEROD

Salome, come and sit next to me. I will give thee the throne of thy mother.

SALOME

I am not tired, Tetrarch.

HERODIAS

You see in what regard she holds you.

HEROD

Bring me——What is it that I desire? I forget. Ah! ah! I remember.

THE VOICE OF IOKANAAN

Behold the time is come! That which I foretold has come to pass. The day that I spake of is at hand.

HERODIAS

Bid him be silent. I will not listen to his

voice. This man is for ever hurling insults against me.

HEROD

He has said nothing against you. Besides, he is a very great prophet.

HERODIAS

I do not believe in prophets. Can a man tell what will come to pass? No man knows it. Also he is for ever insulting me. But I think you are afraid of him. . . . I know well that you are afraid of him.

HEROD

I am not afraid of him. I am afraid of no man.

HERODIAS

I tell you you are afraid of him. If you are not afraid of him why do you not deliver him to the Jews who for these six months past have been clamouring for him?

A JEW

Truly, my lord, it were better to deliver him into our hands.

HEROD

Enough on this subject. I have already given you my answer. I will not deliver him into your hands. He is a holy man. He is a man who has seen God.

A JEW

That cannot be. There is no man who hath seen God since the prophet Elias. He is the last man who saw God face to face. In these days God doth not show Himself. God hideth Himself. Therefore great evils have come upon the land.

ANOTHER JEW

Verily, no man knoweth if Elias the prophet did indeed see God. Peradventure it was but the shadow of God that he saw.

A THIRD JEW

God is at no time hidden. He showeth Himself at all times and in all places. God is in what is evil even as He is in what is good.

A FOURTH JEW

Thou shouldst not say that. It is a very dangerous doctrine. It is a doctrine that cometh from Alexandria, where men teach the philos-

ophy of the Greeks. And the Greeks are Gentiles. They are not even circumcised.

A FIFTH JEW

No man can tell how God worketh. His ways are very dark. It may be that the things which we call evil are good, and that the things which we call good are evil. There is no knowledge of anything. We can but bow our heads to His will, for God is very strong. He breaketh in pieces the strong together with the weak, for He regardeth not any man.

FIRST JEW

Thou speakest truly. Verily, God is terrible. He breaketh in pieces the strong and the weak as men break corn in a mortar. But as for this man, he hath never seen God. No man hath seen God since the prophet Elias.

HERODIAS

Make them be silent. They weary me.

HEROD

But I have heard it said that Iokanaan is in very truth your prophet Elias.

THE JEW

That cannot be. It is more than three hundred years since the days of the prophet Elias.

HEROD

There be some who say that this man is Elias the prophet.

A NAZARENE

I am sure that he is Elias the prophet.

THE JEW

Nay, but he is not Elias the prophet.

THE VOICE OF IOKANAAN

Behold the day is at hand, the day of the Lord, and I hear upon the mountains the feet of Him who shall be the Saviour of the world.

HEROD

What does that mean? The Saviour of the world?

TIGELLINUS

It is a title that Cæsar adopts.

HEROD

But Cæsar is not coming into Judæa. Only

yesterday I received letters from Rome. They contained nothing concerning this matter. And you, Tigellinus, who were at Rome during the winter, you heard nothing concerning this matter, did you?

TIGELLINUS

Sire, I heard nothing concerning the matter. I was but explaining the title. It is one of Cæsar's titles.

HEROD

But Cæsar cannot come. He is too gouty. They say that his feet are like the feet of an elephant. Also there are reasons of state. He who leaves Rome loses Rome. He will not come. Howbeit, Cæsar is lord, he will come if such be his pleasure. Nevertheless, I think he will not come.

FIRST NAZARENE

It was not concerning Cæsar that the prophet spake these words, sire.

HEROD

How?—it was not concerning Cæsar?

FIRST NAZARENE

No, my lord.

HEROD

Concerning whom then did he speak?

FIRST NAZARENE

Concerning Messias, who hath come.

A JEW

Messias hath not come.

FIRST NAZARENE

He hath come, and everywhere He worketh miracles!

HERODIAS

Ho! ho! miracles! I do not believe in miracles. I have seen too many. [*To the Page.*] My fan.

FIRST NAZARENE

This Man worketh true miracles. Thus, at a marriage which took place in a little town of Galilee, a town of some importance, He changed water into wine. Certain persons who were present related it to me. Also He healed two

lepers that were seated before the Gate of Capernaum simply by touching them.

SECOND NAZARENE

Nay; it was two blind men that He healed at Capernaum.

FIRST NAZARENE

Nay; they were lepers. But He hath healed blind people also, and He was seen on a mountain talking with angels.

A SADDUCEE

Angels do not exist.

A PHARISEE

Angels exist, but I do not believe that this Man has talked with them.

FIRST NAZARENE

He was seen by a great multitude of people talking with angels.

HERODIAS

How these men weary me! They are ridiculous! They are altogether ridiculous! [*To the Page.*] Well! my fan? [*The Page gives her the fan.*] You have a dreamer's look. You

must not dream. It is only sick people who dream. [*She strikes the Page with her fan.*]

SECOND NAZARENE

There is also the miracle of the daughter of Jairus.

FIRST NAZARENE

Yea, that is sure. No man can gainsay it.

HERODIAS

Those men are mad. They have looked too long on the moon. Command them to be silent.

HEROD

What is this miracle of the daughter of Jairus?

FIRST NAZARENE

The daughter of Jairus was dead. This Man raised her from the dead.

HEROD

How! He raises people from the dead?

FIRST NAZARENE

Yea, sire; He raiseth the dead.

HEROD

I do not wish Him to do that. I forbid Him to do that. I suffer no man to raise the dead. This Man must be found and told that I forbid Him to raise the dead. Where is this Man at present?

SECOND NAZARENE

He is in every place, my lord, but it is hard to find Him.

FIRST NAZARENE

It is said that He is now in Samaria.

A JEW

It is easy to see that this is not Messias, if He is in Samaria. It is not to the Samaritans that Messias shall come. The Samaritans are accursed. They bring no offerings to the Temple.

SECOND NAZARENE

He left Samaria a few days since. I think that at the present moment He is in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem.

FIRST NAZARENE

No; He is not there. I have just come from

Jerusalem. For two months they have had no tidings of Him.

HEROD

No matter! But let them find Him, and tell Him, thus saith Herod the King, "I will not suffer Thee to raise the dead." To change water into wine, to heal the lepers and the blind. . . . He may do these things if He will. I say nothing against these things. In truth I hold it a kindly deed to heal a leper. But no man shall raise the dead. . . . It would be terrible if the dead came back.

THE VOICE OF IOKANAAN

Ah! The wanton one! The harlot! Ah! the daughter of Babylon with her golden eyes and her gilded eyelids! Thus saith the Lord God, Let there come up against her a multitude of men. Let the people take stones and stone her. . . .

HERODIAS

Command him to be silent!

THE VOICE OF IOKANAAN

Let the captains of the hosts pierce her with

their swords, let them crush her beneath their shields.

HERODIAS

Nay, but it is infamous.

THE VOICE OF IOKANAAN

It is thus that I will wipe out all wickedness from the earth, and that all women shall learn not to imitate her abominations.

HERODIAS

You hear what he says against me? You suffer him to revile her who is your wife!

HEROD

He did not speak your name.

HERODIAS

What does that matter? You know well that it is I whom he seeks to revile. And I am your wife, am I not?

HEROD

Of a truth, dear and noble Herodias, you are my wife, and before that you were the wife of my brother.

HERODIAS

It was thou didst snatch me from his arms.

HEROD

Of a truth I was stronger than he was. . . . But let us not talk of that matter. I do not desire to talk of it. It is the cause of the terrible words that the prophet has spoken. Peradventure on account of it a misfortune will come. Let us not speak of this matter. Noble Herodias, we are not mindful of our guests. Fill thou my cup, my well-beloved. Ho! fill with wine the great goblets of silver, and the great goblets of glass. I will drink to Cæsar. There are Romans here, we must drink to Cæsar.

ALL

Cæsar! Cæsar!

HEROD

Do you not see your daughter, how pale she is?

HERODIAS

What is it to you if she be pale or not?

HEROD

Never have I seen her so pale.

HERODIAS

You must not look at her.

THE VOICE OF IOKANAAN

In that day the sun shall become black like sackcloth of hair, and the moon shall become like blood, and the stars of the heaven shall fall upon the earth like unripe figs that fall from the fig-tree, and the kings of the earth shall be afraid.

HERODIAS

Ah! ah! I should like to see that day of which he speaks, when the moon shall become like blood, and when the stars shall fall upon the earth like unripe figs. This prophet talks like a drunken man, . . . but I cannot suffer the sound of his voice. I hate his voice. Command him to be silent.

HEROD

I will not. I cannot understand what it is that he saith, but it may be an omen.

HERODIAS

I do not believe in omens. He speaks like a drunken man.

HEROD

It may be he is drunk with the wine of God.

HERODIAS

What wine is that, the wine of God? From what vineyards is it gathered? In what wine-press may one find it?

HEROD

[*From this point he looks all the while at Salome.*] Tigellinus, when you were at Rome of late, did the Emperor speak with you on the subject of . . . ?

TIGELLINUS

On what subject, my lord?

HEROD

On what subject? Ah! I asked you a question, did I not? I have forgotten what I would have asked you.

HERODIAS

You are looking again at my daughter. You must not look at her. I have already said so.

HEROD

You say nothing else.

HERODIAS

I say it again.

HEROD

And that restoration of the Temple about which they have talked so much, will anything be done? They say that the veil of the Sanctuary has disappeared, do they not?

HERODIAS

It was thyself didst steal it. Thou speakest at random and without wit. I will not stay here. Let us go within.

HEROD

Dance for me, Salome.

HERODIAS

I will not have her dance.

SALOME

I have no desire to dance, Tetrarch.

HEROD

Salome, daughter of Herodias, dance for me.

HERODIAS

Peace. Let her alone.

HEROD

I command thee to dance, Salome.

SALOME

I will not dance, Tetrarch.

HERODIAS

[*Laughing.*] You see how she obeys you.

HEROD

What is it to me whether she dance or not? It is nought to me. To-night I am happy. I am exceeding happy. Never have I been so happy.

FIRST SOLDIER

The Tetrarch has a sombre look. Has he not a sombre look?

SECOND SOLDIER

Yes, he has a sombre look.

HEROD

Wherefore should I not be happy? Cæsar, who is lord of the world, Cæsar, who is lord of all things, loves me well. He has just sent me most precious gifts. Also he has promised me to summon to Rome the King of Cappadocia, who is mine enemy. It may be that at Rome he will

crucify him, for he is able to do all things that he has a mind to do. Verily, Cæsar is lord. Therefore I do well to be happy. I am very happy, never have I been so happy. There is nothing in the world that can mar my happiness.

THE VOICE OF IOKANAAN

He shall be seated on his throne. He shall be clothed in scarlet and purple. In his hand he shall bear a golden cup full of his blasphemies. And the angel of the Lord shall smite him. He shall be eaten of worms.

HERODIAS

You hear what he says about you. He says that you shall be eaten of worms.

HEROD

It is not of me that he speaks. He speaks never against me. It is of the King of Cappadocia that he speaks; the King of Cappadocia who is mine enemy. It is he who shall be eaten of worms. It is not I. Never has he spoken word against me, this prophet, save that I sinned in taking to wife the wife of my brother. It may be he is right. For, of a truth, you are sterile.

HERODIAS

I am sterile, I? You say that, you that are ever looking at my daughter, you that would have her dance for your pleasure? You speak as a fool. I have borne a child. You have gotten no child, no, not on one of your slaves. It is you who are sterile, not I.

HEROD

Peace, woman! I say that you are sterile. You have borne me no child, and the prophet says that our marriage is not a true marriage. He says that it is a marriage of incest, a marriage that will bring evils. . . . I fear he is right; I am sure that he is right. But it is not the hour to speak of these things. I would be happy at this moment. Of a truth, I am happy. There is nothing I lack.

HERODIAS

I am glad you are of so fair a humour to-night. It is not your custom. But it is late. Let us go within. Do not forget that we hunt at sunrise. All honours must be shown to Cæsar's ambassadors, must they not?

SECOND SOLDIER

The Tetrarch has a sombre look.

FIRST SOLDIER

Yes, he has a sombre look.

HEROD

Salome, Salome, dance for me. I pray thee dance for me. I am sad to-night. Yes, I am passing sad to-night. When I came hither I slipped in blood, which is an ill omen; also I heard in the air a beating of wings, a beating of giant wings. I cannot tell what that may mean. . . . I am sad to-night. Therefore dance for me. Dance for me, Salome, I beseech thee. If thou dancest for me thou mayest ask of me what thou wilt, and I will give it thee. Yes, dance for me, Salome, and whatsoever thou shalt ask of me I will give it thee, even unto the half of my kingdom.

SALOME

[*Rising.*] Will you indeed give me whatsoever I shall ask of you, Tetrarch?

HERODIAS

Do not dance, my daughter.

HEROD

Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, even unto the half of my kingdom.

SALOME

You swear it, Tetrarch?

HEROD

I swear it, Salome.

HERODIAS

Do not dance, my daughter.

SALOME

By what will you swear this thing, Tetrarch?

HEROD

By my life, by my crown, by my gods. Whatsoever thou shalt desire I will give it thee, even to the half of my kingdom, if thou wilt but dance for me. O Salome, Salome, dance for me!

SALOME

You have sworn an oath, Tetrarch.

HEROD

I have sworn an oath.

HERODIAS

My daughter, do not dance.

HEROD

Even to the half of my kingdom. Thou wilt be passing fair as a queen, Salome, if it please thee to ask for the half of my kingdom. Will she not be fair as a queen? Ah! it is cold here! There is an icy wind, and I hear . . . wherefore do I hear in the air this beating of wings? Ah! one might fancy a huge black bird that hovers over the terrace. Why can I not see it, this bird? The beat of its wings is terrible. The breath of the wind of its wings is terrible. It is a chill wind. Nay, but it is not cold, it is hot. I am choking. Pour water on my hands. Give me snow to eat. Loosen my mantle. Quick! quick! loosen my mantle. Nay, but leave it. It is my garland that hurts me, my garland of roses. The flowers are like fire. They have burned my forehead. [*He tears the wreath from his head, and throws it on the table.*] Ah! I can breathe now. How red those petals are! They are like stains of blood on the cloth. That does not matter. It is not wise to find symbols in everything that one sees. It makes life too full of terrors.

It were better to say that stains of blood are as lovely as rose-petals. It were better far to say that. . . . But we will not speak of this. Now I am happy. I am passing happy. Have I not the right to be happy? Your daughter is going to dance for me. Wilt thou not dance for me, Salome? Thou hast promised to dance for me.

HERODIAS

I will not have her dance.

SALOME

I will dance for you, Tetrarch.

HEROD

You hear what your daughter says. She is going to dance for me. Thou doest well to dance for me, Salome. And when thou hast danced for me, forget not to ask of me whatsoever thou hast a mind to ask. Whatsoever thou shalt desire I will give it thee, even to the half of my kingdom. I have sworn it, have I not?

SALOME

Thou hast sworn it, Tetrarch.

HEROD

And I have never failed of my word. I am

not of those who break their oaths. I know not how to lie. I am the slave of my word, and my word is the word of a king. The King of Cappadocia had ever a lying tongue, but he is no true king. He is a coward. Also he owes me money that he will not repay. He has even insulted my ambassadors. He has spoken words that were wounding. But Cæsar will crucify him when he comes to Rome. I know that Cæsar will crucify him. And if he crucify him not, yet will he die, being eaten of worms. The prophet has prophesied it. Well! Wherefore dost thou tarry, Salome?

SALOME

I am waiting until my slaves bring perfumes to me and the seven veils, and take from off my feet my sandals. [*Slaves bring perfumes and the seven veils, and take off the sandals of Salome.*]

HEROD

Ah, thou art to dance with naked feet! 'Tis well! 'Tis well! Thy little feet will be like white doves. They will be like little white flowers that dance upon the trees. . . . No, no, she is going to dance on blood! There is

blood spilt on the ground. She must not dance on blood. It were an evil omen.

HERODIAS

What is it to thee if she dance on blood? Thou hast waded deep enough in it. . . . .

HEROD

What is it to me? Ah! look at the moon! She has become red. She has become red as blood. Ah! the prophet prophesied truly. He prophesied that the moon would become as blood. Did he not prophesy it? All of ye heard him prophesying it. And now the moon has become as blood. Do ye not see it?

HERODIAS

Oh, yes, I see it well, and the stars are falling like unripe figs, are they not? and the sun is becoming black like sackcloth of hair, and the kings of the earth are afraid. That at least one can see. The prophet is justified of his words in that at least, for truly the kings of the earth are afraid. . . . Let us go within. You are sick. They will say at Rome that you are mad. Let us go within, I tell you.

THE VOICE OF IOKANAAN

Who is this who cometh from Edom, who is this who cometh from Bozra, whose raiment is dyed with purple, who shineth in the beauty of his garments, who walketh mighty in his greatness? Wherefore is thy raiment stained with scarlet?

HERODIAS

Let us go within. The voice of that man maddens me. I will not have my daughter dance while he is continually crying out. I will not have her dance while you look at her in this fashion. In a word, I will not have her dance.

HEROD

Do not rise, my wife, my queen, it will avail thee nothing. I will not go within till she hath danced. Dance, Salome, dance for me.

HERODIAS

Do not dance, my daughter.

SALOME

I am ready, Tetrarch.

[*Salome dances the dance of the seven veils.*]

HEROD

Ah! wonderful! wonderful! You see that she

has danced for me, your daughter. Come near, Salome, come near, that I may give thee thy fee. Ah! I pay a royal price to those who dance for my pleasure. I will pay thee royally. I will give thee whatsoever thy soul desireth. What wouldst thou have? Speak.

SALOME

[*Kneeling.*] I would that they presently bring me in a silver charger . . .

HEROD

[*Laughing.*] In a silver charger? Surely yes, in a silver charger. She is charming, is she not? What is it that thou wouldst have in a silver charger, O sweet and fair Salome, thou that art fairer than all the daughters of Judæa? What wouldst thou have them bring thee in a silver charger? Tell me. Whatsoever it may be, thou shalt receive it. My treasures belong to thee. What is it that thou wouldst have, Salome?

SALOME

[*Rising.*] The head of Iokanaan.

HERODIAS

Ah! that is well said, my daughter.

HEROD

No, no!

HERODIAS

That is well said, my daughter.

HEROD

No, no, Salome. It is not that thou desirest. Do not listen to thy mother's voice. She is ever giving thee evil counsel. Do not heed her.

SALOME

It is not my mother's voice that I heed. It is for mine own pleasure that I ask the head of Iokanaan in a silver charger. You have sworn an oath, Herod. Forget not that you have sworn an oath.

HEROD

I know it. I have sworn an oath by my gods. I know it well. But I pray thee, Salome, ask of me something else. Ask of me the half of my kingdom, and I will give it thee. But ask not of me what thy lips have asked.

SALOME

I ask of you the head of Iokanaan.

HEROD

No, no, I will not give it thee.

SALOME

You have sworn an oath, Herod.

HERODIAS

Yes, you have sworn an oath. Everybody heard you. You swore it before everybody.

HEROD

Peace, woman! It is not to you I speak.

HERODIAS

My daughter has done well to ask the head of Iokanaan. He has covered me with insults. He has said unspeakable things against me. One can see that she loves her mother well. Do not yield, my daughter. He has sworn an oath, he has sworn an oath.

HEROD

Peace! Speak not to me! . . . Salome, I pray thee be not stubborn. I have ever been kind toward thee. I have ever loved thee. . . . It may be that I have loved thee too much. Therefore ask not this thing of me. This is a terrible thing, an awful thing to ask of me.

Surely, I think thou art jesting. The head of a man that is cut from his body is ill to look upon, is it not? It is not meet that the eyes of a virgin should look upon such a thing. What pleasure couldst thou have in it? There is no pleasure that thou couldst have in it. No, no, it is not that thou desirest. Hearken to me. I have an emerald, a great emerald and round, that the minion of Cæsar has sent unto me. When thou lookest through this emerald thou canst see that which passeth afar off. Cæsar himself carries such an emerald when he goes to the circus. But my emerald is the larger. I know well that it is the larger. It is the largest emerald in the whole world. Thou wilt take that, wilt thou not? Ask it of me and I will give it thee.

SALOME

I demand the head of Iokanaan.

HEROD

Thou art not listening. Thou art not listening. Suffer me to speak, Salome.

SALOME

The head of Iokanaan!

HEROD

No, no, thou wouldst not have that. Thou sayest that but to trouble me, because that I have looked at thee and ceased not this night. It is true, I have looked at thee and ceased not this night. Thy beauty has troubled me. Thy beauty has grievously troubled me, and I have looked at thee overmuch. Nay, but I will look at thee no more. One should not look at anything. Neither at things, nor at people should one look. Only in mirrors is it well to look, for mirrors do but show us masks. Oh! oh! bring wine! I thirst. . . . Salome, Salome, let us be as friends. Bethink thee . . . Ah! what would I say? What was't? Ah! I remember it! . . . Salome,—nay but come nearer to me; I fear thou wilt not hear my words,—Salome, thou knowest my white peacocks, my beautiful white peacocks, that walk in the garden between the myrtles and the tall cypress-trees. Their beaks are gilded with gold and the grains that they eat are smeared with gold, and their feet are stained with purple. When they cry out the rain comes, and the moon shows herself in the heavens when they spread their tails. Two by two they walk between the cypress-trees and the

black myrtles, and each has a slave to tend it. Sometimes they fly across the trees, and anon they couch in the grass, and round the pools of the water. There are not in all the world birds so wonderful. I know that Cæsar himself has no birds so fair as my birds. I will give thee fifty of my peacocks. They will follow thee whithersoever thou goest, and in the midst of them thou wilt be like unto the moon in the midst of a great white cloud. . . . I will give them to thee, all. I have but a hundred, and in the whole world there is no king who has peacocks like unto my peacocks. But I will give them all to thee. Only thou must loose me from my oath, and must not ask of me that which thy lips have asked of me.

[*He empties the cup of wine.*]

SALOME

Give me the head of Iokanaan!

HERODIAS

Well said, my daughter! As for you, you are ridiculous with your peacocks.

HÉROD

Peace! you are always crying out. You cry

out like a beast of prey. You must not cry in such fashion. Your voice wearies me. Peace, I tell you! . . . Salome, think on what thou art doing. It may be that this man comes from God. He is a holy man. The finger of God has touched him. God has put terrible words into his mouth. In the palace, as in the desert, God is ever with him. . . . It may be that He is, at least. One cannot tell, but it is possible that God is with him and for him. If he die also, peradventure some evil may befall me. Verily, he has said that evil will befall some one on the day whereon he dies. On whom should it fall if it fall not on me? Remember, I slipped in blood when I came hither. Also did I not hear a beating of wings in the air, a beating of vast wings? These are ill omens. And there were other things. I am sure that there were other things, though I saw them not. Thou wouldst not that some evil should befall me, Salome? Listen to me again.

SALOME

Give me the head of Iokanaan!

HEROD

Ah! thou art not listening to me. Be calm. As for me, am I not calm? I am altogether calm.

Listen. I have jewels hidden in this place—jewels that thy mother even has never seen; jewels that are marvellous to look at. I have a collar of pearls, set in four rows. They are like unto moons chained with rays of silver. They are even as half a hundred moons caught in a golden net. On the ivory breast of a queen they have rested. Thou shalt be as fair as a queen when thou wearest them. I have amethysts of two kinds; one that is black like wine, and one that is red like wine that one has coloured with water. I have topazes yellow as are the eyes of tigers, and topazes that are pink as the eyes of a wood-pigeon, and green topazes that are as the eyes of cats. I have opals that burn always, with a flame that is cold as ice, opals that make sad men's minds, and are afraid of the shadows. I have onyxes like the eyeballs of a dead woman. I have moonstones that change when the moon changes, and are wan when they see the sun. I have sapphires big like eggs, and as blue as blue flowers. The sea wanders within them, and the moon comes never to trouble the blue of their waves. I have chrysolites and beryls, and chrysoprases and rubies; I have sardonyx and hyacinth stones, and stones of chalcedony, and I

will give them all unto thee, all, and other things will I add to them. The King of the Indies has but even now sent me four fans fashioned from the feathers of parrots, and the King of Numidia a garment of ostrich feathers. I have a crystal, into which it is not lawful for a woman to look, nor may young men behold it until they have been beaten with rods. In a coffer of nacre I have three wondrous turquoises. He who wears them on his forehead can imagine things which are not, and he who carries them in his hand can turn the fruitful woman into a woman that is barren. These are great treasures. They are treasures above all price. But this is not all. In an ebony coffer I have two cups of amber that are like apples of pure gold. If an enemy pour poison into these cups they become like apples of silver. In a coffer incrusted with amber I have sandals incrusted with glass. I have mantles that have been brought from the land of the Seres, and bracelets decked about with carbuncles and with jade that come from the city of Euphrates. . . . What desirest thou more than this, Salome? Tell me the thing that thou desirest, and I will give it thee. All that thou askest I will give thee, save one thing only.

I will give thee all that is mine, save only the life of one man. I will give thee the mantle of the high priest. I will give thee the veil of the sanctuary.

THE JEWS

Oh! oh!

HERODIAS

Give me the head of Iokanaan!

HEROD

[*Sinking back in his seat.*] Let her be given what she asks! Of a truth she is her mother's child. [*The first soldier approaches. Herodias draws from the hand of the Tetrarch the ring of death, and gives it to the Soldier, who straightway bears it to the Executioner. The Executioner looks scared.*] Who has taken my ring? There was a ring on my right hand. Who has drunk my wine? There was wine in my cup. It was full of wine. Some one has drunk it! Oh! surely some evil will befall some one. [*The Executioner goes down into the cistern.*] Ah! wherefore did I give my oath? Hereafter let no king swear an oath. If he keep it not, it is terrible, and if he keep it, it is terrible also.

HERODIAS

My daughter has done well.

HEROD

I am sure that some misfortune will happen.

SALOME

[*She leans over the cistern and listens.*] There is no sound. I hear nothing. Why does he not cry out, this man? Ah! if any man sought to kill me, I would cry out, I would struggle, I would not suffer. . . . Strike, strike, Naaman, strike, I tell you. . . . No, I hear nothing. There is a silence, a terrible silence. Ah! something has fallen upon the ground. I heard something fall. It was the sword of the executioner. He is afraid, this slave. He has dropped his sword. He dares not kill him. He is a coward, this slave! Let soldiers be sent. [*She sees the Page of Herodias and addresses him.*] Come hither. Thou wert the friend of him who is dead, wert thou not? Well, I tell thee, there are not dead men enough. Go to the soldiers and bid them go down and bring me the thing I ask, the thing the Tetrarch has promised me, the thing that is mine. [*The Page recoils. She turns to the soldiers.*] Hither, ye soldiers. Get

ye down into this cistern and bring me the head of this man. Tetrarch, Tetrarch, command your soldiers that they bring me the head of Iokanaan.

[*A huge black arm, the arm of the Executioner, comes forth from the cistern, bearing on a silver shield the head of Iokanaan. Salome seizes it. Herod hides his face with his cloak. Herodias smiles and fans herself. The Nazarenes fall on their knees and begin to pray.*]

Ah! thou wouldst not suffer me to kiss thy mouth, Iokanaan. Well! I will kiss it now. I will bite it with my teeth as one bites a ripe fruit. Yes, I will kiss thy mouth, Iokanaan. I said it; did I not say it? I said it. Ah! I will kiss it now. . . . But wherefore dost thou not look at me, Iokanaan? Thine eyes that were so terrible, so full of rage and scorn, are shut now. Wherefore are they shut? Open thine eyes! Lift up thine eyelids, Iokanaan! Wherefore dost thou not look at me? Art thou afraid of me, Iokanaan, that thou wilt not look at me? . . . And thy tongue, that was like a red snake darting poison, it moves no more, it speaks no words, Iokanaan, that scarlet viper that spat its venom upon me. It is strange, is it not? How

is it that the red viper stirs no longer? . . . Thou wouldst have none of me, Iokanaan. Thou rejectedst me. Thou didst speak evil words against me. Thou didst bear thyself toward me as to a harlot, as to a woman that is a wanton, to me, Salome, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judæa! Well, I still live, but thou art dead, and thy head belongs to me. I can do with it what I will. I can throw it to the dogs and to the birds of the air. That which the dogs leave, the birds of the air shall devour. . . . Ah, Iokanaan, Iokanaan, thou wert the man that I loved alone among men! All other men were hateful to me. But thou wert beautiful! Thy body was a column of ivory set upon feet of silver. It was a garden full of doves and lilies of silver. It was a tower of silver decked with shields of ivory. There was nothing in the world so white as thy body. There was nothing in the world so black as thy hair. In the whole world there was nothing so red as thy mouth. Thy voice was a censer that scattered strange perfumes, and when I looked on thee I heard a strange music. Ah! wherefore didst thou not look at me, Iokanaan? With the cloak of thine hands, and with the cloak of thy blasphemies

thou didst hide thy face. Thou didst put upon thine eyes the covering of him who would see his God. Well, thou hast seen thy God, Iokanaan, but me, me, thou didst never see. If thou hadst seen me thou hadst loved me. I saw thee, and I loved thee. Oh, how I loved thee! I love thee yet, Iokanaan. I love only thee. . . . I am athirst for thy beauty; I am hungry for thy body; and neither wine nor apples can appease my desire. What shall I do now, Iokanaan? Neither the floods nor the great waters can quench my passion. I was a princess, and thou didst scorn me. I was a virgin, and thou didst take my virginity from me. I was chaste, and thou didst fill my veins with fire. . . . Ah! ah! wherefore didst thou not look at me? If thou hadst looked at me thou hadst loved me. Well I know that thou wouldst have loved me, and the mystery of Love is greater than the mystery of Death.

HEROD

She is monstrous, thy daughter; I tell thee she is monstrous. In truth, what she has done is a great crime. I am sure that it is a crime against some unknown God.

HERODIAS

I am well pleased with my daughter. She has done well. And I would stay here now.

HEROD

[*Rising.*] Ah! There speaks my brother's wife! Come! I will not stay in this place. Come, I tell thee. Surely some terrible thing will befall. Manasseh, Issachar, Ozias, put out the torches. I will not look at things, I will not suffer things to look at me. Put out the torches! Hide the moon! Hide the stars! Let us hide ourselves in our palace, Herodias. I begin to be afraid.

[*The slaves put out the torches. The stars disappear. A great cloud crosses the moon and conceals it completely. The stage becomes quite dark. The Tetrarch begins to climb the staircase.*]

THE VOICE OF SALOME

Ah! I have kissed thy mouth, Iokanaan, I have kissed thy mouth. There was a bitter taste on thy lips. Was it the taste of blood? . . . Nay; but perchance it was the taste of love.

. . . They say that love hath a bitter taste. . . . But what matter? what matter? I have kissed thy mouth, Iokanaan, I have kissed thy mouth.

[*A ray of moonlight falls on Salome and illumines her.*]

HEROD

[*Turning round and seeing Salome.*] Kill that woman!

[*The soldiers rush forward and crush beneath their shields Salome, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judæa.*]

CURTAIN.

PART VII

THE SOUL OF MAN UNDER SOCIALISM.

The chief advantage that would result from the establishment of Socialism is, undoubtedly, the fact that Socialism would relieve us from that sordid necessity of living for others which, in the present condition of things, presses so hardly upon almost everybody. In fact, scarcely any one at all escapes.

Now and then, in the course of the century, a great man of science, like Darwin; a great poet, like Keats; a fine critical spirit, like M. Renan; a supreme artist, like Flaubert, has been able to isolate himself, to keep himself out of reach of the clamorous claims of others, to stand "under the shelter of the wall," as Plato puts it, and so to realise the perfection of what was in him, to his own incomparable gain, and to the incomparable and lasting gain of the whole world. These, however, are exceptions. The majority of people spoil their lives by an unhealthy and exaggerated altruism—are forced, indeed, so to spoil them. They find themselves surrounded by hideous poverty, by

hideous ugliness, by hideous starvation. It is inevitable that they should be strongly moved by all this. The emotions of man are stirred more quickly than man's intelligence; and, as I pointed out some time ago in an article on the function of criticism, it is much more easy to have sympathy with suffering than it is to have sympathy with thought. Accordingly, with admirable though misdirected intentions, they very seriously and very sentimentally set themselves to the task of remedying the evils that they see. But their remedies do not cure the disease: they merely prolong it. Indeed, their remedies are part of the disease.

They try to solve the problem of poverty, for instance, by keeping the poor alive; or, in the case of a very advanced school, by amusing the poor.

But this is not a solution: it is an aggravation of the difficulty. *The proper aim is to try and reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible.* And the altruistic virtues have really prevented the carrying out of this aim. Just as the worst slave-owners were those who were kind to their slaves, and so prevented the horror of the system being realised by those who suffered from it, and understood by those who contemplated it, so, in the present state of things in England, the

people who do most harm are the people who try to do most good; and at last we have had the spectacle of men who have really studied the problem and know the life—educated men who live in the East End—coming forward and imploring the community to restrain its altruistic impulses of charity, benevolence, and the like. They do so on the ground that such charity degrades and demoralises. They are perfectly right. Charity creates a multitude of sins.

There is also this to be said. It is immoral to use private property in order to alleviate the horrible evils that result from the institution of private property. It is both immoral and unfair.

Under Socialism all this will, of course, be altered. There will be no people living in fetid dens and fetid rags, and bringing up unhealthy, hunger-pinched children in the midst of impossible and absolutely repulsive surroundings. The security of society will not depend, as it does now, on the state of the weather. If a frost comes we shall not have a hundred thousand men out of work, tramping about the streets in a state of disgusting misery, or whining to their neighbours for alms, or crowding round the doors of loathsome shelters to try and secure a hunch of bread and a night's un-

clean lodging. Each member of the society will share in the general prosperity and happiness of the society, and if a frost comes no one will practically be anything the worse.

Upon the other hand, *Socialism itself will be of value simply because it will lead to Individualism.*

Socialism, Communism, or whatever one chooses to call it, by converting private property into public wealth, and substituting co-operation for competition, will restore society to its proper condition of a thoroughly healthy organism, and insure the material well-being of each member of the community. It will, in fact, give Life its proper basis and its proper environment. But for the full development of Life to its highest mode of perfection, something more is needed. What is needed is Individualism. If the Socialism is Authoritarian; if there are Governments armed with economic power as they are now with political power; if, in a word, we are to have Industrial Tyrannies, then the last state of man will be worse than the first. At present, in consequence of the existence of private property, a great many people are enabled to develop a certain very limited amount of Individualism. They are either under no necessity to work for their living, or are enabled to choose the sphere of activity that

is really congenial to them and gives them pleasure. These are the poets, the philosophers, the men of science, the men of culture—in a word, the real men, the men who have realised themselves, and in whom all Humanity gains a partial realisation. Upon the other hand, there are a great many people who, having no private property of their own, and being always on the brink of sheer starvation, are compelled to do the work of beasts of burden, to do work that is quite uncongenial to them, and to which they are forced by the peremptory, unreasonable, degrading Tyranny of want. These are the poor, and amongst them there is no grace of manner, or charm of speech, or civilisation, or culture, or refinement in pleasures, or joy of life. From their collective force Humanity gains much in material prosperity. But it is only the material result that it gains, and the man who is poor is in himself absolutely of no importance. He is merely the infinitesimal atom of a force that, so far from regarding him, crushes him: indeed, prefers him crushed, as in that case he is far more obedient.

Of course, it might be said that the Individualism generated under conditions of private property is not always, or even as a rule, of a fine or wonderful type, and that the poor, if they have not cul-

ture and charm, have still many virtues. Both these statements would be quite true. The possession of private property is very often extremely demoralising, and that is, of course, one of the reasons why Socialism wants to get rid of the institution. In fact, property is really a nuisance. Some years ago people went about the country saying that property has duties. They said it so often and so tediously that, at last, the Church has begun to say it. One hears it now from every pulpit. It is perfectly true. Property not merely has duties, but has so many duties that its possession to any large extent is a bore. It involves endless claims upon one, endless attention to business, endless bother. If property had simply pleasures, we could stand it; but its duties make it unbearable. In the interest of the rich we must get rid of it. The virtues of the poor may be readily admitted, and are much to be regretted. We are often told that the poor are grateful for charity. Some of them are, no doubt, *but the best amongst the poor are never grateful.* They are ungrateful, discontented, disobedient, and rebellious. They are quite right to be so. Charity they feel to be a ridiculously inadequate mode of partial restitution, or a sentimental dole, usually accompanied by some impertinent at-

tempt on the part of the sentimentalist to tyrannise over their private lives. Why should they be grateful for the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table? They should be seated at the board, and are beginning to know it. As for being discontented, a man who would not be discontented with such surroundings and such a low mode of life would be a perfect brute. Disobedience, in the eyes of any one who has read history, is man's original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion. Sometimes the poor are praised for being thrifty. But to recommend thrift to the poor is both grotesque and insulting. It is like advising a man who is starving to eat less. For a town or country labourer to practise thrift would be absolutely immoral. Man should not be ready to show that he can live like a badly-fed animal. He should decline to live like that, and should either steal or go on the rates, which is considered by many to be a form of stealing. As for begging, it is safer to beg than to take, but it is finer to take than to beg. No; a poor man who is ungrateful, unthrifty, discontented, and rebellious is probably a real personality, and has much in him. He is at any rate a healthy protest. As for the virtuous poor, one

can pity them, of course, but one cannot possibly admire them. They have made private terms with the enemy and sold their birthright for very bad pottage. They must also be extraordinarily stupid. I can quite understand a man accepting laws that protect private property, and admit of its accumulation, as long as he himself is able under these conditions to realise some form of beautiful and intellectual life. But it is almost incredible to me how a man whose life is marred and made hideous by such laws can possibly acquiesce in their continuance.

However, the explanation is not really so difficult to find. It is simply this. Misery and poverty are so absolutely degrading, and exercise such a paralysing effect over the nature of men, that no class is ever really conscious of its own suffering. They have to be told of it by other people, and they often entirely disbelieve them. What is said by great employers of labour against agitators is unquestionably true. Agitators are a set of interfering, meddling people, who come down to some perfectly contented class of the community, and sow the seeds of discontent amongst them. That is the reason why agitators are so absolutely necessary. Without them, in our incomplete state,

there would be no advance towards civilisation. Slavery was put down in America, not in consequence of any action on the part of the slaves, or even any express desire on their part that they should be free. It was put down entirely through the grossly illegal conduct of certain agitators in Boston and elsewhere, who were not slaves themselves, nor owners of slaves, nor had anything to do with the question really. It was, undoubtedly, the Abolitionists who set the torch alight, who began the whole thing. And it is curious to note that from the slaves themselves they received, not merely very little assistance, but hardly any sympathy even; and when at the close of the war the slaves found themselves free, found themselves indeed so absolutely free that they were free to starve, many of them bitterly regretted the new state of things. To the thinker, the most tragic fact in the whole of the French Revolution is not that Marie Antoinette was killed for being a queen, but that the starved peasant of the Vendée voluntarily went out to die for the hideous cause of feudalism.

It is clear, then, that no Authoritarian Socialism will do. For while under the present system a very large number of people can lead lives of a certain amount of freedom and expression and happiness,

under an industrial barrack system, or a system of economic tyranny, nobody would be able to have any such freedom at all. It is to be regretted that a portion of our community should be practically in slavery, but to propose to solve the problem by enslaving the entire community is childish. Every man must be left quite free to choose his own work. No form of compulsion must be exercised over him. If there is, his work will not be good for him, will not be good in itself, and will not be good for others. And by work I simply mean activity of any kind.

I hardly think that any Socialist, nowadays, would seriously propose that an inspector should call every morning at each house to see that each citizen rose up and did manual labour for eight hours. Humanity has got beyond that stage, and reserves such a form of life for the people whom, in a very arbitrary manner, it chooses to call criminals. But I confess that many of the socialistic views that I have come across seem to me to be tainted with ideas of authority, if not of actual compulsion. Of course, authority and compulsion are out of the question. All association must be quite voluntary. *It is only in voluntary associations that man is fine.*

But it may be asked how Individualism, which is now more or less dependent on the existence of private property for its development, will benefit by the abolition of such private property. The answer is very simple. It is true that, under existing conditions, a few men who have had private means of their own, such as Byron, Shelley, Browning, Victor Hugo, Baudelaire, and others, have been able to realise their personality more or less completely. Not one of these men ever did a single day's work for hire. They were relieved from poverty. They had an immense advantage. The question is whether it would be for the good of Individualism that such an advantage should be taken away. Let us suppose that it is taken away. What happens then to Individualism? How will it benefit?

It will benefit in this way. Under the new conditions Individualism will be far freer, far finer, and far more intensified than it is now. I am not talking of the great imaginatively-realised Individualism of such poets as I have mentioned, but of the great actual Individualism latent and potential in mankind generally. For the recognition of private property has really harmed Individualism, and obscured it, by confusing a man with what

he possesses. It has led Individualism entirely astray. It has made gain not growth its aim. So that man thought that the important thing was to have, and did not know that the important thing is to be. *The true perfection of man lies, not in what man has, but in what man is.* Private property has crushed true Individualism, and set up an Individualism that is false. It has debarred one part of the community from being individual by starving them. It has debarred the other part of the community from being individual by putting them on the wrong road and encumbering them. Indeed, so completely has man's personality been absorbed by his possessions that the English law has always treated offences against a man's property with far more severity than offences against his person, and property is still the test of complete citizenship. The industry necessary for the making of money is also very demoralising. In a community like ours, where property confers immense distinction, social position, honour, respect, titles, and other pleasant things of the kind, man, being naturally ambitious, makes it his aim to accumulate this property, and goes on wearily and tediously accumulating it long after he has got far more than he wants, or can use, or enjoy, or per-

haps even know of. Man will kill himself by overwork in order to secure property, and really, considering the enormous advantages that property brings, one is hardly surprised. One's regret is that society should be constructed on such a basis that man has been forced into a groove in which he cannot freely develop what is wonderful, and fascinating, and delightful in him—in which, in fact, he misses the true pleasure and joy of living. He is also, under existing conditions, very insecure. An enormously wealthy merchant may be—often is—at every moment of his life at the mercy of things that are not under his control. If the wind blows an extra point or so, or the weather suddenly changes, or some trivial thing happens, his ship may go down, his speculations may go wrong, and he finds himself a poor man, with his social position quite gone. Now, nothing should be able to harm a man except himself. Nothing should be able to rob a man at all. What a man really has, is what is in him. What is outside of him should be a matter of no importance.

With the abolition of private property, then, we shall have true, beautiful, healthy Individualism. Nobody will waste his life in accumulating things, and the symbols for things. One will live. To live

is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all.

It is a question whether we have ever seen the full expression of a personality, except on the imaginative plane of art. In action, we never have. Cæsar, says Mommsen, was the complete and perfect man. But how tragically insecure was Cæsar! Wherever there is a man who exercises authority, there is a man who resists authority. Cæsar was very perfect, but his perfection travelled by too dangerous a road. Marcus Aurelius was the perfect man, says Renan. Yes; the great emperor was a perfect man. But how intolerable were the endless claims upon him! He staggered under the burden of the empire. He was conscious how inadequate one man was to bear the weight of that Titan and too vast orb. What I mean by a perfect man is one who develops under perfect conditions; one who is not wounded, or worried, or maimed, or in danger. *Most personalities have been obliged to be rebels. Half their strength has been wasted in friction.* Byron's personality, for instance, was terribly wasted in its battle with the stupidity, and hypocrisy, and Philistinism of the English. Such battles do not always intensify strength: they often exaggerate weakness. Byron was never able to give

us what he might have given us. Shelley escaped better. Like Byron, he got out of England as soon as possible. But he was not so well known. If the English had had any idea of what a great poet he really was, they would have fallen on him with tooth and nail, and made his life as unbearable to him as they possibly could. But he was not a remarkable figure in society, and consequently he escaped, to a certain degree. Still, even in Shelley the note of rebellion is sometimes too strong. The note of the perfect personality is not rebellion, but peace.

It will be a marvellous thing—the true personality of man—when we see it. It will grow naturally and simply, flower-like, or as a tree grows. It will not be at discord. It will never argue or dispute. It will not prove things. It will know everything. And yet it will not busy itself about knowledge. It will have wisdom. Its value will not be measured by material things. It will have nothing. And yet it will have everything, and whatever one takes from it, it will still have, so rich will it be. It will not be always meddling with others, or asking them to be like itself. It will love them because they will be different. And yet, while it will not meddle with others, it will help all,

as a beautiful thing helps us by being what it is. The personality of man will be very wonderful. It will be as wonderful as the personality of a child.

In its development it will be assisted by Christianity, if men desire that; but if men do not desire that, it will develop none the less surely. For it will not worry itself about the past, nor care whether things happened or did not happen. Nor will it admit any laws but its own laws; nor any authority but its own authority. Yet it will love those who sought to intensify it, and speak often of them. And of these Christ was one.

"Know Thyself" was written over the portal of the antique world. Over the portal of the new world, "Be Thyself" shall be written. And the message of Christ to man was simply "Be Thyself." That is the secret of Christ.

When Jesus talks about the poor He simply means personalities, just as when He talks about the rich He simply means people who have not developed their personalities. Jesus moved in a community that allowed the accumulation of private property just as ours does, and the gospel that He preached was not that in such a community it is an advantage for a man to live on scanty, unwholesome food, to wear ragged, unwholesome clothes, to

sleep in horrid, unwholesome dwellings, and a disadvantage for a man to live under healthy, pleasant, and decent conditions. Such a view would have been wrong there and then, and would, of course, be still more wrong now and in England; for as man moves northwards the material necessities of life become of more vital importance, and our society is infinitely more complex, and displays far greater extremes of luxury and pauperism than any society of the antique world. What Jesus meant was this. He said to man, "You have a wonderful personality. Develop it. Be yourself. Don't imagine that your perfection lies in accumulating or possessing external things. Your perfection is inside of you. If only you could realise that, you would not want to be rich. Ordinary riches can be stolen from a man. Real riches cannot. In the treasury-house of your soul there are infinitely precious things, that may not be taken from you. And so, try to so shape your life that external things will not harm you. And try also to get rid of personal property. It involves sordid preoccupation, endless industry, continual wrong. Personal property hinders Individualism at every step." It is to be noted that Jesus never says that impoverished people are necessarily good, or

wealthy people necessarily bad. That would not have been true. Wealthy people are, as a class, better than impoverished people, more moral, more intellectual, more well-behaved. *There is only one class in the community that thinks more about money than the rich, and that is the poor.* The poor can think of nothing else. That is the misery of being poor. What Jesus does say is that man reaches his perfection, not through what he has, not even through what he does, but entirely through what he is. And so the wealthy young man who comes to Jesus is represented as a thoroughly good citizen, who has broken none of the laws of his state, none of the commandments of his religion. He is quite respectable, in the ordinary sense of that extraordinary word. Jesus says to him, "You should give up private property. It hinders you from realising your perfection. It is a drag upon you. It is a burden. Your personality does not need it. It is within you, and not outside of you, that you will find what you really are, and what you really want." To His own friends He says the same thing. He tells them to be themselves, and not to be always worrying about other things. What do other things matter? Man is complete in himself. When they go into the world,

the world will disagree with them. That is inevitable. The world hates Individualism. But this is not to trouble them. They are to be calm and self-centred. If a man takes their cloak, they are to give him their coat, just to show that material things are of no importance. If people abuse them, they are not to answer back. What does it signify? The things people say of a man do not alter a man. He is what he is. Public opinion is of no value whatsoever. Even if people employ actual violence, they are not to be violent in turn. That would be to fall to the same low level. After all, even in prison, a man can be quite free. His soul can be free. His personality can be untroubled. He can be at peace. And, above all things, they are not to interfere with other people or judge them in any way. Personality is a very mysterious thing. A man cannot always be estimated by what he does. He may keep the law, and yet be worthless. He may break the law, and yet be fine. He may be bad, without ever doing anything bad. He may commit a sin against society, and yet realise through that sin his true perfection.

There was a woman who was taken in adultery. We are not told the history of her love, but that love must have been very great; for Jesus said that

her sins were forgiven her, not because she repented, but because her love was so intense and wonderful. Later on, a short time before His death, as He sat at a feast, the woman came in and poured costly perfumes on His hair. His friends tried to interfere with her, and said that it was an extravagance, and that the money that the perfume cost should have been expended on charitable relief of people in want, or something of that kind. Jesus did not accept that view. He pointed out that the material needs of Man were great and very permanent, but that the spiritual needs of Man were greater still, and that in one divine moment, and by selecting its own mode of expression, a personality might make itself perfect. The world worships the woman, even now, as a saint.

Yes; there are suggestive things in Individualism. Socialism annihilates family life, for instance. With the abolition of private property, marriage in its present form must disappear. This is part of the programme. Individualism accepts this and makes it fine. It converts the abolition of legal restraint into a form of freedom that will help the full development of personality, and make the love of man and woman more wonderful, more beautiful, and more ennobling. Jesus knew this.

He rejected the claims of family life, although they existed in His day and community in a very marked form. "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" He said, when He was told that they wished to speak to Him. When one of His followers asked leave to go and bury his father, "Let the dead bury the dead," was His terrible answer. He would allow no claim whatsoever to be made on personality.

And so he who would lead a Christ-like life is he who is perfectly and absolutely himself. He may be a great poet, or a great man of science; or a young student at a University, or one who watches sheep upon a moor; or a maker of dramas, like Shakespeare, or a thinker about God, like Spinoza; or a child who plays in a garden, or a fisherman who throws his nets into the sea. It does not matter what he is, as long as he realises the perfection of the soul that is within him. All imitation in morals and in life is wrong. Through the streets of Jerusalem at the present day crawls one who is mad and carries a wooden cross on his shoulders. He is a symbol of the lives that are marred by imitation. Father Damien was Christ-like when he went out to live with the lepers, because in such service he realised fully what was best

in him. But he was not more Christ-like than Wagner, when he realised his soul in music; or than Shelley, when he realised his soul in song. There is no one type for man. There are as many perfections as there are imperfect men. And while to the claims of charity a man may yield and yet be free, to the claims of conformity no man may yield and remain free at all.

Individualism, then, is what through Socialism we are to attain to. As a natural result the State must give up all idea of government. It must give it up because, as a wise man once said many centuries before Christ, there is such a thing as leaving mankind alone; there is no such thing as governing mankind. *All modes of government are failures.* Despotism is unjust to everybody, including the despot, who was probably made for better things. Oligarchies are unjust to the many, and ochlocracies are unjust to the few. High hopes were once formed of democracy; but democracy means simply the bludgeoning of the people by the people for the people. It has been found out. I must say that it was high time, for all authority is quite degrading. It degrades those who exercise it, and degrades those over whom it is exercised. When it is violently, grossly, and

cruelly used, it produces a good effect, by creating, or at any rate bringing out, the spirit of revolt and individualism that is to kill it. When it is used with a certain amount of kindness, and accompanied by prizes and rewards, it is dreadfully demoralising. People, in that case, are less conscious of the horrible pressure that is being put on them, and so go through their lives in a sort of coarse comfort, like petted animals, without ever realising that they are probably thinking other people's thoughts, living by other people's standards, wearing practically what one may call other people's second-hand clothes, and never being themselves for a single moment. "He who would be free," says a fine thinker, "must not conform." And authority, by bribing people to conform, produces a very gross kind of overfed barbarism amongst us.

With authority, punishment will pass away. This will be a great gain—a gain, in fact, of incalculable value. As one reads history, not in the expurgated editions written for schoolboys and passmen, but in the original authorities of each time, one is absolutely sickened, not by the crimes that the wicked have committed, but by the punishments that the good have inflicted; *and a com-*

munity is infinitely more brutalised by the habitual employment of punishment than it is by the occasional occurrence of crime. It obviously follows that the more punishment is inflicted the more crime is produced, and most modern legislation has clearly recognised this, and has made it its task to diminish punishment as far as it thinks it can. Wherever it has really diminished it the results have always been extremely good. The less punishment the less crime. When there is no punishment at all, crime will either cease to exist, or, if it occurs, will be treated by physicians as a very distressing form of dementia, to be cured by care and kindness. For what are called criminals nowadays are not criminals at all. Starvation, and not sin, is the parent of modern crime. That indeed is the reason why our criminals are, as a class, so absolutely uninteresting from any psychological point of view. They are not marvellous Macbeths and terrible Vautrins. They are merely what ordinary, respectable, commonplace people would be if they had not got enough to eat. When private property is abolished there will be no necessity for crime, no demand for it; it will cease to exist. Of course, all crimes are not crimes against property, though such are the crimes that the English law, valuing what

a man has more than what a man is, punishes with the harshest and most horrible severity, if we except the crime of murder, and regard death as worse than penal servitude, a point on which our criminals, I believe, disagree. But though a crime may not be against property, it may spring from the misery and rage and depression produced by our wrong system of property-holding, and so, when that system is abolished, will disappear. When each member of the community has sufficient for his wants, and is not interfered with by his neighbour, it will not be an object of any interest to him to interfere with any one else. Jealousy, which is an extraordinary source of crime in modern life, is an emotion closely bound up with our conceptions of property, and under Socialism and Individualism will die out. It is remarkable that in communistic tribes jealousy is entirely unknown.

Now, as the State is not to govern, it may be asked what the State is to do. The State is to be a voluntary association that will organise labour, and be the manufacturer and distributor of necessary commodities. *The State is to make what is useful. The individual is to make what is beautiful.* And as I have mentioned the word labour, I cannot help saying that a great deal of nonsense is

being written and talked nowadays about the dignity of manual labour. There is nothing necessarily dignified about manual labour at all, and most of it is absolutely degrading. It is mentally and morally injurious to man to do anything in which he does not find pleasure, and many forms of labour are quite pleasureless activities, and should be regarded as such. To sweep a slushy crossing for eight hours on a day when the east wind is blowing is a disgusting occupation. To sweep it with mental, moral, or physical dignity seems to me to be impossible. To sweep it with joy would be appalling. Man is made for something better than disturbing dirt. All work of that kind should be done by a machine.

And I have no doubt that it will be so. Up to the present, man has been, to a certain extent, the slave of machinery, and there is something tragic in the fact that as soon as man had invented a machine to do his work he began to starve. This, however, is, of course, the result of our property system and our system of competition. One man owns a machine which does the work of five hundred men. Five hundred men are, in consequence, thrown out of employment, and, having no work to do, become hungry and take to thieving. The one man secures

the produce of the machine and keeps it, and has five hundred times as much as he should have, and probably, which is of much more importance, a great deal more than he really wants. Were that machine the property of all, every one would benefit by it. It would be an immense advantage to the community. All unintellectual labour, all monotonous, dull labour, all labour that deals with dreadful things, and involves unpleasant conditions, must be done by machinery. Machinery must work for us in coal mines, and do all sanitary services, and be the stoker of steamers, and clean the streets, and run messages on wet days, and do anything that is tedious or distressing. *At present machinery competes against man. Under proper conditions machinery will serve man.* There is no doubt at all that this is the future of machinery, and just as trees grow while the country gentleman is asleep, so while Humanity will be amusing itself, or enjoying cultivated leisure—which, and not labour, is the aim of man—or making beautiful things, or reading beautiful things, or simply contemplating the world with admiration and delight, machinery will be doing all the necessary and unpleasant work. The fact is, that civilisation requires slaves. The Greeks were quite right there. Unless there are

slaves to do the ugly, horrible, uninteresting work, culture and contemplation become almost impossible. Human slavery is wrong, insecure, and demoralising. On mechanical slavery, on the slavery of the machine, the future of the world depends. And when scientific men are no longer called upon to go down to a depressing East End and distribute bad cocoa and worse blankets to starving people, they will have delightful leisure in which to devise wonderful and marvellous things for their own joy and the joy of every one else. There will be great storages of force for every city, and for every house if required, and this force man will convert into heat, light, or motion, according to his needs. Is this Utopian? A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.

Now, I have said that the community by means of organisation of machinery will supply the useful things, and that the beautiful things will be made by the individual. This is not merely necessary, but it is the only possible way by which we can get either the one or the other. An individual who has

to make things for the use of others, and with reference to their wants and their wishes, does not work with interest, and consequently cannot put into his work what is best in him. Upon the other hand, whenever a community or a powerful section of a community, or a government of any kind, attempts to dictate to the artist what he is to do, Art either entirely vanishes, or becomes stereotyped, or degenerates into a low and ignoble form of craft. *A work of art is the unique result of a unique temperament. Its beauty comes from the fact that the author is what he is. It has nothing to do with the fact that other people want what they want.* Indeed, the moment that an artist takes notice of what other people want, and tries to supply the demand, he ceases to be an artist, and becomes a dull or an amusing craftsman, an honest or a dishonest tradesman. He has no further claim to be considered as an artist. *Art is the most intense mode of individualism that the world has known.* I am inclined to say that it is the only real mode of individualism that the world has known. Crime, which, under certain conditions, may seem to have created individualism, must take cognisance of other people and interfere with them. It belongs to the sphere of action. But alone, with-

out any reference to his neighbours, without any interference, the artist can fashion a beautiful thing; and if he does not do it solely for his own pleasure, he is not an artist at all.

And it is to be noted that it is the fact that Art is this intense form of individualism that makes the public try to exercise over it an authority that is as immoral as it is ridiculous, and as corrupting as it is contemptible. It is not quite their fault. The public have always, and in every age, been badly brought up. They are continually asking Art to be popular, to please their want of taste, to flatter their absurd vanity, to tell them what they have been told before, to show them what they ought to be tired of seeing, to amuse them when they feel heavy after eating too much, and to distract their thoughts when they are wearied of their own stupidity. *Now Art should never try to be popular. The public should try to make itself artistic.* There is a very wide difference. If a man of science were told that the results of his experiments, and the conclusions that he arrived at, should be of such a character that they would not upset the received popular notions on the subject, or disturb popular prejudice, or hurt the sensibilities of people who

knew nothing about science; if a philosopher were told that he had a perfect right to speculate in the highest spheres of thought, provided that he arrived at the same conclusions as were held by those who had never thought in any sphere at all—well, nowadays the man of science and the philosopher would be considerably amused. Yet it is really a very few years since both philosophy and science were subjected to brutal popular control, to authority in fact—the authority of either the general ignorance of the community, or the terror and greed for power of an ecclesiastical or governmental class. Of course, we have to a very great extent got rid of any attempt on the part of the community or the Church, or the Government, to interfere with the individualism of speculative thought, but the attempt to interfere with the individualism of imaginative art still lingers. In fact, it does more than linger: it is aggressive, offensive, and brutalising.

In England, the arts that have escaped best are the arts in which the public take no interest. Poetry is an instance of what I mean. We have been able to have fine poetry in England because the public do not read it, and consequently do not influence it. The public like to insult poets be-

cause they are individual, but once they have insulted them they leave them alone. In the case of the novel and the drama, arts in which the public do take an interest, the result of the exercise of popular authority has been absolutely ridiculous. No country produces such badly written fiction, such tedious, common work in the novel form, such silly, vulgar plays as England. It must necessarily be so. The popular standard is of such a character that no artist can get to it. It is at once too easy and too difficult to be a popular novelist. It is too easy, because the requirements of the public as far as plot, style, psychology, treatment of life, and treatment of literature are concerned, are within the reach of the very meanest capacity and the most uncultivated mind. It is too difficult, because to meet such requirements the artist would have to do violence to his temperament, would have to write not for the artistic joy of writing, but for the amusement of half-educated people, and so would have to suppress his individualism, forget his culture, annihilate his style, and surrender everything that is valuable in him. In the case of the drama, things are a little better: the theatre-going public like the obvious, it is true, but they do not like the tedious; and burlesque and farcical com-

edy, the two most popular forms, are distinct forms of art. Delightful work may be produced under burlesque and farcical conditions, and in work of this kind the artist in England is allowed very great freedom. It is when one comes to the higher forms of the drama that the result of popular control is seen. The one thing that the public dislike is novelty. Any attempt to extend the subject-matter of art is extremely distasteful to the public; and yet the vitality and progress of art depend in a large measure on the continual extension of subject-matter. The public dislike novelty because they are afraid of it. It represents to them a mode of Individualism, an assertion on the part of the artist that he selects his own subject, and treats it as he chooses. The public are quite right in their attitude. Art is Individualism, and Individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. Therein lies its immense value. For what it seeks to disturb is monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of a machine. In Art, the public accept what has been, because they cannot alter it, not because they appreciate it. They swallow their classics whole, and never taste them. They endure them as the inevitable, and, as they cannot mar them, they mouth

about them. Strangely enough, or not strangely, according to one's own views, this acceptance of the classics does a great deal of harm. The uncritical admiration of the Bible and Shakespeare in England is an instance of what I mean. With regard to the Bible, considerations of ecclesiastical authority enter into the matter, so that I need not dwell upon the point.

But in the case of Shakespeare it is quite obvious that the public really see neither the beauties nor the defects of his plays. If they saw the beauties, they would not object to the development of the drama; and if they saw the defects, they would not object to the development of the drama either. *The fact is, the public make use of the classics of a country as a means of checking the progress of Art.* They degrade the classics into authorities. They use them as bludgeons for preventing the free expression of Beauty in new forms. They are always asking a writer why he does not write like somebody else, or a painter why he does not paint like somebody else, quite oblivious of the fact that if either of them did anything of the kind he would cease to be an artist. A fresh mode of Beauty is absolutely distasteful to them, and whenever it appears they get so angry and bewildered that

they always use two stupid expressions—one is that the work of art is grossly unintelligible; the other, that the work of art is grossly immoral. What they mean by these words seems to me to be this. When they say a work is grossly unintelligible, they mean that the artist has said or made a beautiful thing that is new; when they describe a work as grossly immoral, they mean that the artist has said or made a beautiful thing that is true. The former expression has reference to style; the latter to subject-matter. But they probably use the words very vaguely, as an ordinary mob will use ready-made paving-stones. *There is not a single real poet or prose writer of this century, for instance, on whom the British public have not solemnly conferred diplomas of immorality,* and these diplomas practically take the place, with us, of what in France is the formal recognition of an Academy of Letters, and fortunately make the establishment of such an institution quite unnecessary in England. Of course, the public are very reckless in their use of the word. That they should have called Wordsworth an immoral poet was only to be expected. Wordsworth was a poet. But that they should have called Charles Kingsley an immoral novelist is extraordinary. Kingsley's

prose was not of a very fine quality. Still, there is the word, and they use it as best they can. An artist is, of course, not disturbed by it. The true artist is a man who believes absolutely in himself, because he is absolutely himself. But I can fancy that if an artist produced a work of art in England that immediately on its appearance was recognised by the public, through their medium, which is the public press, as a work that was quite intelligible and highly moral, he would begin to seriously question whether in its creation he had really been himself at all, and consequently whether the work was not quite unworthy of him, and either of a thoroughly second-rate order, or of no artistic value whatsoever.

Perhaps, however, I have wronged the public in limiting them to such words as "immoral," "unintelligible," "exotic," and "unhealthy." There is one other word that they use. That word is "morbid." They do not use it often. The meaning of the word is so simple that they are afraid of using it. Still, they use it sometimes, and, now and then, one comes across it in popular newspapers. It is, of course, a ridiculous word to apply to a work of art. For what is morbidity but a mood of emotion or a mode of thought that one cannot express?

The public are all morbid, because the public can never find expression for anything. *The artist is never morbid. He expresses everything.* He stands outside his subject, and through its medium produces incomparable and artistic effects. To call an artist morbid because he deals with morbidity as his subject-matter is as silly as if one called Shakespeare mad because he wrote *King Lear*.

On the whole, an artist in England gains something by being attacked. His individuality is intensified. He becomes more completely himself. Of course, the attacks are very gross, very impertinent, and very contemptible. But then no artist expects grace from the vulgar mind, or style from the suburban intellect. Vulgarity and stupidity are two very vivid facts in modern life. One regrets them, naturally. But there they are. They are subjects for study, like everything else. And it is only fair to state, with regard to modern journalists, that they always apologise to one in private for what they have written against one in public.

Within the last few years two other adjectives, it may be mentioned, have been added to the very limited vocabulary of art abuse that is at the disposal of the public. One is the word "unhealthy,"

the other is the word "exotic." The latter merely expresses the rage of the momentary mushroom against the immortal, entrancing, and exquisitely lovely orchid. It is a tribute, but a tribute of no importance. The word "unhealthy," however, admits of analysis. It is a rather interesting word. In fact, it is so interesting that the people who use it do not know what it means.

What does it mean? What is a healthy or an unhealthy work of art? All terms that one applies to a work of art, provided that one applies them rationally, have reference to either its style or its subject, or to both together. From the point of view of style, a healthy work of art is one whose style recognises the beauty of the material it employs, be that material one of words or of bronze, of colour or of ivory, and uses that beauty as a factor in producing the æsthetic effect. From the point of view of subject, a healthy work of art is one the choice of whose subject is conditioned by the temperament of the artist, and comes directly out of it. In fine, a healthy work of art is one that has both perfection and personality. Of course, form and substance cannot be separated in a work of art; they are always one. But for purposes of analysis, and setting the wholeness of æsthetic im-

pression aside for a moment, we can intellectually so separate them. An unhealthy work of art, on the other hand, is a work whose style is obvious, old-fashioned, and common, and whose subject is deliberately chosen, not because the artist has any pleasure in it, but because he thinks that the public will pay him for it. *In fact, the popular novel that the public calls healthy is always a thoroughly unhealthy production; and what the public call an unhealthy novel is always a beautiful and healthy work of art.*

I need hardly say that I am not, for a single moment, complaining that the public and the public press misuse these words. I do not see how, with their lack of comprehension of what Art is, they could possibly use them in the proper sense. I am merely pointing out the misuse; and as for the origin of the misuse and the meaning that lies behind it all, the explanation is very simple. It comes from the barbarous conception of authority. It comes from the natural inability of a community corrupted by authority to understand or appreciate Individualism. In a word, it comes from that monstrous and ignorant thing that is called Public Opinion, which, bad and well-meaning as it is when it tries

to control action, is infamous and of evil meaning when it tries to control Thought or Art.

Indeed, there is much more to be said in favour of the physical force of the public than there is in favour of the public's opinion. The former may be fine. The latter must be foolish. It is often said that force is no argument. That, however, entirely depends on what one wants to prove. Many of the most important problems of the last few centuries, such as the continuance of personal government in England, or feudalism in France, have been solved entirely by means of physical force. The very violence of a revolution may make the public grand and splendid for a moment. It was a fatal day when the public discovered that the pen is mightier than the paving-stone, and can be made as offensive as the brick-bat. They at once sought for the journalist, found him, developed him, and made him their industrious and well-paid servant. It is greatly to be regretted, for both their sakes. Behind the barricade there may be much that is noble and heroic. But what is there behind the leading article but prejudice, stupidity, cant, and twaddle? And when these four are joined together they make a terrible force, and constitute the new authority.

In old days men had the rack. Now they have

the press. That is an improvement certainly. But still it is very bad, and wrong, and demoralising. Somebody—was it Burke?—called journalism the fourth estate. That was true at the time, no doubt. But at the present moment it really is the only estate. It has eaten up the other three. The Lords Temporal say nothing, the Lords Spiritual have nothing to say, and the House of Commons has nothing to say and says it. We are dominated by Journalism. In America the President reigns for four years, and Journalism governs for ever and ever. Fortunately, in America journalism has carried its authority to the grossest and most brutal extreme. As a natural consequence it has begun to create a spirit of revolt. People are amused by it, or disgusted by it, according to their temperaments. But it is no longer the real force it was. It is not seriously treated. In England, Journalism, not, except in a few well-known instances, having been carried to such excesses of brutality, is still a great factor, a really remarkable power. The tyranny that it proposes to exercise over people's private lives seems to me to be quite extraordinary. *The fact is, that the public have an insatiable curiosity to know everything, except what is worth knowing.* Journalism, conscious of this, and hav-

ing tradesmanlike habits, supplies their demands. In centuries before ours the public nailed the ears of journalists to the pump. That was quite hideous. In this century journalists have nailed their own ears to the keyhole. That is much worse. And what aggravates the mischief is that the journalists who are most to blame are not the amusing journalists who write for what are called Society papers. The harm is done by the serious, thoughtful, earnest journalists, who solemnly, as they are doing at present, will drag before the eyes of the public some incident in the private life of a great statesman, of a man who is a leader of political thought as he is a creator of political force, and invite the public to discuss the incident, to exercise authority in the matter, to give their views, and not merely to give their views, but to carry them into action, to dictate to the man upon all other points, to dictate to his party, to dictate to his country; in fact, to make themselves ridiculous, offensive, and harmful. The private lives of men and women should not be told to the public. The public have nothing to do with them at all. In France they manage these things better. There they do not allow the details of the trials that take place in the divorce courts to be published for the amuse-

ment or criticism of the public. All that the public are allowed to know is that the divorce has taken place and was granted on petition of one or other or both of the married parties concerned. In France, in fact, they limit the journalist, and allow the artist almost perfect freedom. *Here we allow absolute freedom to the journalist, and entirely limit the artist.* English public opinion, that is to say, tries to constrain and impede and warp the man who makes things that are beautiful in effect, and compels the journalist to retail things that are ugly, or disgusting, or revolting in fact, so that we have the most serious journalists in the world, and the most indecent newspapers. It is no exaggeration to talk of compulsion. There are possibly some journalists who take a real pleasure in publishing horrible things, or who, being poor, look to scandals as forming a sort of permanent basis for an income. But there are other journalists, I feel certain, men of education and cultivation, who really dislike publishing these things, who know that it is wrong to do so, and only do it because the unhealthy conditions under which their occupation is carried on oblige them to supply the public with what the public wants, and to compete with other journalists in making [illegible] as full and

satisfying to the gross popular appetite as possible. It is a very degrading position for any body of educated men to be placed in, and I have no doubt that most of them feel it acutely.

However, let us leave what is really a very sordid side of the subject, and return to the question of popular control in the matter of Art, by which I mean Public Opinion dictating to the artist the form which he is to use, the mode in which he is to use it, and the materials with which he is to work. I have pointed out that the arts which have escaped best in England are the arts in which the public have not been interested. They are, however, interested in the drama, and as a certain advance has been made in the drama within the last ten or fifteen years, it is important to point out that this advance is entirely due to a few individual artists refusing to accept the popular want of taste as their standard, and refusing to regard Art as a mere matter of demand and supply. With his marvellous and vivid personality, with a style that has really a true colour-element in it, with his extraordinary power, not over mere mimicry, but over imaginative and intellectual creation, Mr. Irving, had his sole object been to give the public what they wanted, could have produced the commonest plays

in the commonest manner, and made as much success and money as a man could possibly desire. But his object was not that. His object was to realise his own perfection as an artist, under certain conditions, and in certain forms of Art. At first he appealed to the few: now he has educated the many. He has created in the public both taste and temperament. The public appreciate his artistic success immensely. I often wonder, however, whether the public understand that that success is entirely due to the fact that he did not accept their standard, but realised his own. With their standard the Lyceum would have been a sort of second-rate booth, as some of the popular theatres in London are at present. Whether they understand it or not, the fact, however, remains, that taste and temperament have to a certain extent been created in the public, and that the public are capable of developing these qualities. The problem then is, Why do not the public become more civilised? They have the capacity. What stops them?

The thing that stops them, it must be said again, is their desire to exercise authority over the artist and over works of art. To certain theatres, such as the Lyceum and the Haymarket, the public seem to come in a proper mood. In both of these thea-

tres there have been individual artists, who have succeeded in creating in their audiences—and every theatre in London has its own audience—the temperament to which Art appeals. And what is that temperament? It is the temperament of receptivity. That is all.

If a man approaches a work of art with any desire to exercise authority over it and the artist, he approaches it in such a spirit that he cannot receive any artistic impression from it at all. *The work of art is to dominate the spectator: the spectator is not to dominate the work of art.* The spectator is to be receptive. He is to be the violin on which the master is to play. And the more completely he can suppress his own silly views, his own foolish prejudices, his own absurd ideas of what Art should be or should not be, the more likely he is to understand and appreciate the work of art in question. This is, of course, quite obvious in the case of the vulgar theatre-going public of English men and women. But it is equally true of what are called educated people. For an educated person's ideas of Art are drawn naturally from what Art has been, whereas the new work of art is beautiful by being what Art has never been; and to measure it by the standard of the past is to

measure it by a standard on the rejection of which its real perfection depends. A temperament capable of receiving, through an imaginative medium, and under imaginative conditions, new and beautiful impressions is the only temperament that can appreciate a work of art. And true as this is in the case of the appreciation of sculpture and painting, it is still more true of the appreciation of such arts as the drama. For a picture and a statue are not at war with Time. They take no count of its succession. In one moment their unity may be apprehended. In the case of literature it is different. Time must be traversed before the unity of effect is realised. And so, in the drama, there may occur in the first act of the play something whose real artistic value may not be evident to the spectator till the third or fourth act is reached. Is the silly fellow to get angry and call out, and disturb the play, and annoy the artists? No. The honest man is to sit quietly, and know the delightful emotions of wonder, curiosity, and suspense. He is not to go to the play to lose a vulgar temper. He is to go to the play to realise an artistic temperament. He is to go to the play to gain an artistic temperament. He is not the arbiter of the work of art. He is one who is admitted to contemplate

the work of art, and, if the work be fine, to forget in its contemplation all the egotism that mars him —the egotism of his ignorance, or the egotism of his information. This point about the drama is hardly, I think, sufficiently recognised. I can quite understand that were *Macbeth* produced for the first time before a modern London audience, many of the people present would strongly and vigorously object to the introduction of the witches in the first act, with their grotesque phrases and their ridiculous words. But when the play is over one realises that the laughter of the witches in *Macbeth* is as terrible as the laughter of madness in *Lear,* more terrible than the laughter of Iago in the tragedy of the Moor. No spectator of art needs a more perfect mood of receptivity than the spectator of a play. The moment he seeks to exercise authority he becomes the avowed enemy of Art and of himself. Art does not mind. It is he who suffers.

With the novel it is the same thing. Popular authority and the recognition of popular authority are fatal. Thackeray's *Esmond* is a beautiful work of art because he wrote it to please himself. In his other novels, in *Pendennis,* in *Philip,* in *Vanity Fair* even, at times, he is too conscious

of the public, and spoils his work by appealing directly to the sympathies of the public, or by directly mocking at them. *A true artist takes no notice whatever of the public. The public are to him non-existent.* He has no poppied or honeyed cakes through which to give the monster sleep or sustenance. He leaves that to the popular novelist. One incomparable novelist we have now in England, Mr. George Meredith. There are better artists in France, but France has no one whose view of life is so large, so varied, so imaginatively true. There are tellers of stories in Russia who have a more vivid sense of what pain in fiction may be. But to him belongs philosophy in fiction. His people not merely live, but they live in thought. One can see them from myriad points of view. They are suggestive. There is soul in them and around them. They are interpretative and symbolic. And he who made them, those wonderful quickly moving figures, made them for his own pleasure, and has never asked the public what they wanted, has never cared to know what they wanted, has never allowed the public to dictate to him or influence him in any way, but has gone on intensifying his own personality, and producing his own individual work. At first none came to him. That did not

matter. Then the few came to him. That did not change him. The many have come now. He is still the same. He is an incomparable novelist.

With the decorative arts it is not different. The public clung with really pathetic tenacity to what I believe were the direct traditions of the Great Exhibition of international vulgarity, traditions that were so appalling that the houses in which people lived were only fit for blind people to live in. Beautiful things began to be made, beautiful colours came from the dyer's hand, beautiful patterns from the artist's brain, and the use of beautiful things and their value and importance were set forth. The public were really very indignant. They lost their temper. They said silly things. No one minded. No one was a whit the worse. No one accepted the authority of public opinion. And now it is almost impossible to enter any modern house without seeing some recognition of good taste, some recognition of the value of lovely surroundings, some sign of appreciation of beauty. In fact, people's houses are, as a rule, quite charming nowadays. People have been to a very great extent civilised. It is only fair to state, however, that the extraordinary success of the revolution in house decoration and furniture and the like has not really

been due to the majority of the public developing a very fine taste in such matters. It has been chiefly due to the fact that the craftsmen of things so appreciated the pleasure of making what was beautiful, and woke to such a vivid consciousness of the hideousness and vulgarity of what the public had previously wanted, that they simply starved the public out. It would be quite impossible at the present moment to furnish a room as rooms were furnished a few years ago, without going for everything to an auction of second-hand furniture from some third-rate lodging-house. The things are no longer made. However they may object to it, people must nowadays have something charming in their surroundings. Fortunately for them, their assumption of authority in these art matters came to entire grief.

It is evident, then, that all authority in such things is bad. People sometimes inquire what form of government is most suitable for an artist to live under. To this question there is only one answer. *The form of government that is most suitable to the artist is no government at all.* Authority over him and his art is ridiculous. It has been stated that under despotisms artists have produced lovely work. This is not quite so. Artists have visited

despots, not as subjects to be tyrannised over, but as wandering wonder-makers, as fascinating vagrant personalities, to be entertained and charmed and suffered to be at peace, and allowed to create. There is this to be said in favour of the despot, that he, being an individual, may have culture, while the mob, being a monster, has none. One who is an Emperor and King may stoop down to pick up a brush for a painter, but when the democracy stoops down it is merely to throw mud. And yet the democracy have not so far to stoop as the Emperor. In fact, when they want to throw mud they have not to stoop at all. But there is no necessity to separate the monarch from the mob; all authority is equally bad.

There are three kinds of despots. There is the despot who tyrannises over the body. There is the despot who tyrannises over the soul. There is the despot who tyrannises over soul and body alike. The first is called the Prince. The second is called the Pope. The third is called the People. The Prince may be cultivated. Many Princes have been. Yet in the Prince there is danger. One thinks of Dante at the bitter feast in Verona, of Tasso in Ferrara's madman's cell. It is better for the artist not to live with Princes. The Pope may

be cultivated. Many Popes have been; the bad Popes have been. The bad Popes loved Beauty, almost as passionately, nay, with as much passion as the good Popes hated Thought. To the wickedness of the Papacy humanity owes much. The goodness of the Papacy owes a terrible debt to humanity. Yet, though the Vatican has kept the rhetoric of its thunders and lost the rod of its lightning, it is better for the artist not to live with Popes. It was a Pope who said of Cellini to a conclave of Cardinals that common laws and common authority were not made for men such as he; but it was a Pope who thrust Cellini into prison, and kept him there till he sickened with rage, and created unreal visions for himself, and saw the gilded sun enter his room, and grew so enamoured of it that he sought to escape, and crept out from tower to tower, and falling through dizzy air at dawn, maimed himself, and was by a vine-dresser covered with vine leaves, and carried in a cart to one who, loving beautiful things, had care of him. There is danger in Popes. And as for the People, what of them and their authority? Perhaps of them and their authority one has spoken enough. Their authority is a thing blind, deaf, hideous, grotesque, tragic, amusing, serious, and obscene. It is

impossible for the artist to live with the People. All despots bribe. The people bribe and brutalise. Who told them to exercise authority? They were made to live, to listen, and to love. Some one has done them a great wrong. They have marred themselves by imitation of their inferiors. They have taken the sceptre of the Prince. How should they use it? They have taken the triple tiara of the Pope. How should they carry its burden? They are as a clown whose heart is broken. They are as a priest whose soul is not yet born. Let all who love Beauty pity them. Though they themselves love not Beauty, yet let them pity themselves. Who taught them the trick of tyranny?

There are many other things that one might point out. One might point out how the Renaissance was great, because it sought to solve no social problem, and busied itself not about such things, but suffered the individual to develop freely, beautifully, and naturally, and so had great and individual artists, and great and individual men. One might point out how Louis XIV, by creating the modern state, destroyed the individualism of the artist, and made things monstrous in their monotony of repetition, and contemptible in their conformity to rule, and destroyed throughout all

France all those fine freedoms of expression that had made tradition new in beauty, and new modes one with antique form. But the past is of no importance. The present is of no importance. It is with the future that we have to deal. For the past is what man should not have been. The present is what man ought not to be. The future is what artists are.

It will, of course, be said that such a scheme as is set forth here is quite unpractical, and goes against human nature. This is perfectly true. It is unpractical, and it goes against human nature. This is why it is worth carrying out, and that is why one proposes it. For what is a practical scheme? *A practical scheme is either a scheme that is already in existence, or a scheme that could be carried out under existing conditions.* But it is exactly the existing conditions that one objects to; and any scheme that could accept these conditions is wrong and foolish. The conditions will be done away with, and human nature will change. The only thing that one really knows about human nature is that it changes. Change is the one quality we can predicate of it. The systems that fail are those that rely on the permanency of human nature, and not on its growth and development. The

error of Louis XIV was that he thought human nature would always be the same. The result of his error was the French Revolution. It was an admirable result. All the results of the mistakes of governments are quite admirable.

It is to be noted also that Individualism does not come to man with any sickly cant about duty, which merely means doing what other people want because they want it; or any hideous cant about self-sacrifice, which is merely a survival of savage mutilation. *In fact, it does not come to man with any claims upon him at all. It comes naturally and inevitably out of man.* It is the point to which all development tends. It is the differentiation to which all organisms grow. It is the perfection that is inherent in every mode of life, and towards which every mode of life quickens. And so Individualism exercises no compulsion over man. On the contrary, it says to man that he should suffer no compulsion to be exercised over him. It does not try to force people to be good. It knows that people are good when they are let alone. Man will develop Individualism out of himself. Man is now so developing Individualism. To ask whether Individualism is practical is like asking whether Evolution is practical. *Evolution is the law of life,*

and there is no evolution except towards Individualism. Where this tendency is not expressed, it is a case of artificially arrested growth, or of disease, or of death.

Individualism will also be unselfish and unaffected. It has been pointed out that one of the results of the extraordinary tyranny of authority is that words are absolutely distorted from their proper and simple meaning, and are used to express the obverse of their right signification. What is true about Art is true about Life. A man is called affected, nowadays, if he dresses as he likes to dress. But in doing that he is acting in a perfectly natural manner. Affectation, in such matters, consists in dressing according to the views of one's neighbour, whose views, as they are the views of the majority, will probably be extremely stupid. Or a man is called selfish if he lives in the manner that seems to him most suitable for the full realisation of his own personality; if, in fact, the primary aim of his life is self-development. But this is the way in which every one should live. *Selfishness is not living as one wishes to live, it is asking others to live as one wishes to live.* And unselfishness is letting other people's lives alone, not interfering with them. Selfishness always aims at creating

around it an absolute uniformity of type. Unselfishness recognises infinite variety of type as a delightful thing, accepts it, acquiesces in it, enjoys it. It is not selfish to think for oneself. A man who does not think for himself does not think at all. It is grossly selfish to require of one's neighbour that he should think in the same way, and hold the same opinions. Why should he? If he can think, he will probably think differently. If he cannot think, it is monstrous to require thought of any kind from him. A red rose is not selfish because it wants to be a red rose. It would be horribly selfish if it wanted all the other flowers in the garden to be both red and roses. Under Individualism people will be quite natural and absolutely unselfish, and will know the meanings of the words, and realise them in their free, beautiful lives. Nor will men be egotistic as they are now. For the egotist is he who makes claims upon others, and the Individualist will not desire to do that. It will not give him pleasure. When man has realised Individualism, he will also realise sympathy and exercise it freely and spontaneously. Up to the present man has hardly cultivated sympathy at all. He has merely sympathy with pain, and sympathy with pain is not the highest form of sympathy.

All sympathy is fine, but sympathy with suffering is the least fine mode. It is tainted with egotism. It is apt to become morbid. There is in it a certain element of terror for our own safety. We become afraid that we ourselves might be as the leper or as the blind, and that no man would have care of us. It is curiously limiting, too. One should sympathise with the entirety of life, not with life's sores and maladies merely, but with life's joy and beauty and energy and health and freedom. The wider sympathy is, of course, the more difficult. It requires more unselfishness. Anybody can sympathise with the sufferings of a friend, but it requires a very fine nature—it requires, in fact, the nature of a true Individualist—to sympathise with a friend's success. In the modern stress of competition and struggle for place, such sympathy is naturally rare, and is also very much stifled by the immoral ideal of uniformity of type and conformity to rule which is so prevalent everywhere, and is perhaps most obnoxious in England.

Sympathy with pain there will, of course, always be. It is one of the first instincts of man. The animals which are individual, the higher animals that is to say, share it with us. But it must be remembered that while sympathy with joy in-

tensifies the sum of joy in the world, sympathy with pain does not really diminish the amount of pain. It may make man better able to endure evil, but the evil remains. Sympathy with consumption does not cure consumption; that is what Science does. And when Socialism has solved the problem of poverty, and Science solved the problem of disease, the area of the sentimentalists will be lessened, and the sympathy of man will be large, healthy, and spontaneous. Man will have joy in the contemplation of the joyous lives of others.

For it is through joy that the Individualism of the future will develop itself. *Christ made no attempt to reconstruct society, and consequently the Individualism that He preached to man could be realised only through pain or in solitude.* The ideals that we owe to Christ are the ideals of the man who abandons society entirely, or of the man who resists society absolutely. But man is naturally social. Even the Thebaid became peopled at last. And though the cenobite realises his personality, it is often an impoverished personality that he so realises. Upon the other hand, the terrible truth that pain is a mode through which man may realise himself exercised a wonderful fascination over the world. Shallow speakers and

shallow thinkers in pulpits and on platforms often talk about the world's worship of pleasure, and whine against it. But it is rarely in the world's history that its ideal has been one of joy and beauty. The worship of pain has far more often dominated the world. Mediævalism, with its saints and martyrs, its love of self-torture, its wild passion for wounding itself, its gashing with knives, and its whipping with rods—Mediævalism is real Christianity, and the mediæval Christ is the real Christ. When the Renaissance dawned upon the world, and brought with it the new ideals of the beauty of life and the joy of living, men could not understand Christ. Even Art shows us that. The painters of the Renaissance drew Christ as a little boy playing with another boy in a palace or a garden, or lying back in His mother's arms, smiling at her, or at a flower, or at a bright bird; or as a noble, stately figure moving nobly through the world; or as a wonderful figure rising in a sort of ecstasy from death to life. Even when they drew Him crucified, they drew Him as a beautiful God on whom evil men had inflicted suffering. But He did not preoccupy them much. What delighted them was to paint the men and women whom they admired, and to show the loveliness of this lovely earth.

They painted many religious pictures; in fact, they painted far too many, and the monotony of type and motive is wearisome and was bad for art. It was the result of the authority of the public in art matters, and it is to be deplored. But their soul was not in the subject. Raphael was a great artist when he painted his portrait of the Pope. When he painted his Madonnas and infant Christs, he is not a great artist at all. Christ had no message for the Renaissance, which was wonderful because it brought an ideal at variance with His, and to find the presentation of the real Christ we must go to mediæval art. There He is one maimed and marred; one who is not comely to look on, because Beauty is a joy; one who is not in fair raiment, because that may be a joy also: He is a beggar who has a marvellous soul; He is a leper whose soul is divine; He needs neither property nor health; He is a God realising His perfection through pain.

The evolution of man is slow. The injustice of men is great. It was necessary that pain should be put forward as a mode of self-realisation. Even now in some places in the world, the message of Christ is necessary. No one who lived in modern Russia could possibly realise his perfection except by pain. A few Russian artists have realised them-

selves in Art, in a fiction that is mediæval in character, because its dominant note is the realisation of men through suffering. But for those who are not artists, and to whom there is no mode of life but the actual life of fact, pain is the only door to perfection. A Russian who lives happily under the present system of government in Russia must either believe that man has no soul, or that, if he has, it is not worth while developing. A Nihilist who rejects all authority, because he knows authority to be evil, and who welcomes all pain, because through that he realises his personality, is a real Christian. To him the Christian ideal is a true thing.

And yet, Christ did not revolt against authority. He accepted the imperial authority of the Roman Empire and paid tribute. He endured the ecclesiastical authority of the Jewish Church, and would not repel its violence by any violence of His own. He had, as I said before, no scheme for the reconstruction of society. But the modern world has schemes. It proposes to do away with poverty and the suffering that it entails. It desires to get rid of pain, and the suffering that pain entails. It trusts to Socialism and to Science as its methods. What it aims at is an Individualism expressing

itself through joy. This Individualism will be larger, fuller, lovelier than any Individualism has ever been. Pain is not the ultimate mode of perfection. It is merely provisional and a protest. It has reference to wrong, unhealthy, unjust surroundings. When the wrong, and the disease, and the injustice are removed, it will have no further place. It will have done its work. It was a great work, but it is almost over. Its sphere lessens every day.

Nor will man miss it. *For what man has sought for is, indeed, neither pain nor pleasure, but simply Life.* Man has sought to live intensely, fully, perfectly. When he can do so without exercising restraint on others, or suffering it ever, and his activities are all pleasurable to him, he will be saner, healthier, more civilised, more himself. Pleasure is Nature's test, her sign of approval. When man is happy, he is in harmony with himself and his environment. The new Individualism, for whose service Socialism, whether it wills it or not, is working, will be perfect harmony. It will be what the Greeks sought for, but could not, except in Thought, realise completely, because they had slaves, and fed them; it will be what the Renaissance sought for, but could not realise completely

except in Art, because it had slaves, and starved them. It will be complete, and through it each man will attain to his perfection. The new Individualism is the new Hellenism.

PART VIII

DE PROFUNDIS

LETTERS FROM READING PRISON.

Letter I

10*th March* 1896.

My Dear Robbie,—I want you to have a letter written at once to Mr. —— the solicitor, stating that as my wife has promised to settle a third on me, in the case of her predeceasing me, I do not wish any opposition to be made to her purchasing my life interest. I feel that I have brought such unhappiness on her, and such ruin on my children, that I have no right to go against her wishes in anything. She was gentle and good to me here, when she came to see me. I have full trust in her. Please have this done at once, and thank my friends for their kindness. I feel I am acting rightly leaving this to my wife.

Please write to Stuart Merrill in Paris, or Robert Sherard, to say how grateful I was at the performance of my play, and have my thanks

conveyed to Lugne-Poë:[1] it is something that at a time of disgrace and shame I should be still regarded as an artist: I wish I could feel more pleasure, but I seem dead to all emotions except those of anguish and despair. However, please let Lugne-Poë know that I am sensible of the honour he has done me. He is a poet himself. I fear you will find it difficult to read this, but as I am not allowed writing materials I seem to have forgotten how to write—you must excuse me. Thank More for exerting himself for books; unluckily I suffer from headaches when I read my Greek and Roman poets—so they have not been of much use—but his kindness was great in getting the set. Ask him to express my gratitude to the lady who lives at Wimbledon. Write to me please in answer to this, and tell me about literature, what new books, etc.—also Jones's play and Forbes-Robertson's management:—about any new tendency in the stage of Paris or London. Also try and see what Lemaître, Bauër, and Sarcey said of *Salomé,* and give me a little *résumé;* please write to Henri Bauër, and say I am touched at his writing nicely; Robert Sherard knows him.

[1] The first impersonator of Herod and the first producer of *Salomé* in Paris, 1896.

It was sweet of you to come and see me. You must come again next time. Here I have the horror of death with the still greater horror of living, and in silence and misery. . . .

. . . . . .[1]

I always remember you with deep affection.

I wish Ernest would get from Oakley Street my portmanteau, fur coat, clothes, and the books of my own writing which I gave my dear mother —ask . . . in whose name the burial ground of my mother was taken.

Always your friend,

OSCAR WILDE.